



THAT WOMAN

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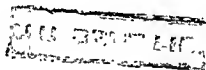
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# That Woman

Her Seven Years in Power

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**K. A. Abbas**



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## PREFACE

A SPATE OF BOOKS ABOUT INDIRA GANDHI CONTINUES TO COME out of the printing presses. The whole world is curious about the woman who leads India. At the moment, at least half a dozen books are being written by Indian and foreign authors on, and about, Indira Gandhi.

Why am I adding one more book to this crowded list, specially when I have already written her biography seven years ago? That, indeed, is my justification. For this is, in a way, a sequel to *Indira Gandhi : Return Of The Red Rose*. That book brought her story up to the time she assumed power. This one is about the eventful and crowded seven years that she has been in power.

I wrote then that "India and Indira are now hopelessly, and hopefully, involved with each other." I am now able to confirm that statement, though I make no claims to clairvoyance. Nor has anyone so far accused me of being a sycophant of the people in power.

I don't think Indira Gandhi is the incarnation of a goddess. I don't think she is a genius, or a miracle-worker. But I do think that Indira Gandhi, a woman of uncommon common-sense, working on the groundwork of democracy, secularism, socialism and an independent foreign policy, left behind by Jawaharlal Nehru, has proved to be a most resolute and resour-

cessful Prime Minister of India. Today, she is not only the greatest woman in the world, but taller than any other living statesman or politician of any other country. Above all, her political personality, like her physical personality, has been steadily *developing*, progressively evolving, becoming maturer and deeper and more responsive to the aspirations of the people. "Renewal and change," she told me once, "are the only constants of life. We have to respond to them." And so she becomes bigger and more dynamic with every passing crisis, as she successfully faces one challenge after another. Today she—a woman—has become a natural, and naturally-accepted, leader of men.

As an Indira-watcher, I have been a witness of this amazing metamorphosis of a somewhat diffident Prime Minister-by-courtesy into the dynamic catalyst of sweeping changes that have taken place in her own party, in the country, and in the sub-continent. No wonder she is loved, respected, admired, adored, worshipped, feared, criticised, castigated, condemned, libelled or slandered by different people, and by different classes of people, according to their personal predilections and class interests, which may be either subserved or subverted by her policies and programmes. But she can never be ignored, never taken for granted. Unpredictable, as only a woman can be, she keeps her friends and enemies guessing, in a perpetual state of suspense, as to the next move she is likely to make. There has never been a woman of such enormous political stature in Indian history—or in world history.

When Yahya Khan, in an interview to a foreign correspondent on the eve of the Fourteen Days War, contemptuously referred to her as "That Woman", he did not know that he was not being very original. A number of Indian business tycoons and frustrated politicians of the Opposition parties, whose political and economic corns had been trodden upon and hurt by the Socialistic policies and programmes initiated by her, were already referring to her as "That Woman"—even as President Roosevelt, after he initiated the New Deal, was invariably referred to as "That Man" or "That Man In The White House" by the tycoons of Wall Street. The contempt and hostility that she arouses in certain classes is the very measure of her phenomenal popularity among the common people, who love her and

trust her and hopefully look up to her, despite the many failures of her Government.

This book is an attempt to analyse, assess and understand this inter-relation of Indira and India—the leader and the people—and how the will of the people moulded the contours of her policy, and how she, with her prodigious drive and energy, reinforced that dynamic will of the people and transformed it into a social revolution that, one day, will change the face of India and the character of Indians.

Numerous friends have helped me to assess and understand her personality, how it has evolved under the impact of national and international events and to what extent, in its turn, it has left its impact on public issues and affairs. I derived a great deal from my talks with them, but the opinions expressed in this book are strictly my own. Some of them, for obvious reasons, would not like to be named. But I may mention, in particular, my old friend and Central Minister of Planning D.P. Dhar, the Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting J.K. Gujral, the former Chief Minister of Orissa Shrimati Nandini Satpathy, veteran Congressman and former Member of Parliament Ansar Harvani, and Editor Russy Karanjia of *Blitz*, who allowed the reproduction of material which had already appeared in my columns. My thanks are also due to Sharada Prasad, the genial Director of Information in the Prime Minister's Secretariat, and her Personal Secretary, N.K. Seshan, who were both very co-operative and helpful in arranging the several interviews with the Prime Minister, and in providing me the details of her schedule of appointments on some memorable days. My friend and former colleague in the *Bombay Chronicle*, N.G. Jog, for old time's sake, agreed to read through the manuscript, and made valuable suggestions to improve the syntax. Last but not the least I am grateful to Mrs. Teji Bachchan, a close friend of the Prime Minister, who gave some rare insights into Indira Gandhi's personality and personal life.

While discussing with Mrs. Teji Bachchan the fascinating and somewhat paradoxical aspects of Indira Gandhi's life and personality, it occurred to me that, perhaps, one of the secrets of her success, and perennial source of her astonishing inner strength, was the plain fact that she was a woman, a

remarkable woman, an exceptional woman, but a woman, nevertheless. One may start off this study of Indira Gandhi's seven years in power by having a look at the whole colourful contemporary cavalcade of India's working women, of whom she is the outstanding representative.



# I

## 250 Million Women And One Woman !

*I do not regard myself as a woman.  
I am a person with a job.*

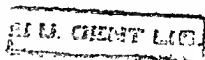
—INDIRA GANDHI

SILHOUETTED AGAINST THE BURNING INDIAN SKY SHE COMES walking—a slim, taut, work-hardened figure, carrying two infants, the elder asleep in the basket on her head, and the newborn held in the crook of her arm. Little clouds of dust rise and cling to her bare feet. The tinkle of her bracelets provides a counter-point to the lullaby song she is softly humming.

There is dust in her hair but a smile on her lips, as she eyes the babe in her arms. She is tired after the day's work at home and in the fields, for, having got up at cock's crow, she has tended and fed the cattle, collected the cow-dung which she has made into cakes plastered over the back wall of her hut to dry in the sun; she has washed and scrubbed, and cooked the meal for her husband, and carried it to the field where, after six hours of ploughing the hard, unyielding earth, a mighty hunger awaited her arrival.

And now she is returning home to eat herself, to feed the babies, the younger one at her breast. Then she will ply the *charkha*,<sup>1</sup> do a little sewing and mending, then back to the

1. Spinning wheel.



cooking hearth. In between, she will snatch a few moments of siesta to rest her tired body, and then be ready with a smiling invitation to greet her man.

The shadows of the long line of women, carrying the empty inverted water pots on their heads, are tracing a moving pattern on the hot-brown sand dunes.

They are walking at an astonishingly quick pace—marching like soldiers, with their free arms swinging, while the brass *gagars*<sup>1</sup> and the clay pots are expertly balanced on their heads, without any support from their hands. Some of them are humming or singing a Rajasthan folk-song, invoking the rain clouds which, like faithless lovers, only promise to come but never come.

These women are on the way to the well or the water-hole which, depending on the severity of the drought, may be three or five or nine or twelve miles away from their village. They will bring back the precious water which will be used sparingly, rationed almost miserly, only for drinking and cooking, till it is time to make another trek across the parched land.

The drum-beats echo in the night and a group of young tribal women is seen weaving sinuous patterns in the light of the flickering torches, keeping up a fast rhythm of the dance with the vigorous, fluid movements of their bodies. White saris draped over little black bodies, they are not so much dancing, as they are flowing, like water, frolicking like the waves in a tempestuous sea. Their steps are synchronised with each other, with the rhythm of the drum, their shoulders pressed against each other, their hands around each other's waist. Their eyes are flashing to match their spontaneous smiles, even white teeth sparkling in the light of the flames.

This is a dance of pure joy, exbilarating self-expression, for there is no audience, no applause, no box-office. The girls are dancing just to amuse themselves, or maybe to refresh themselves, after the day's hard toil.

They have finished a twelve-hour working day, some of

1. Water-pots.

them collecting dry leaves in the forest, making bundles, and loading them in the contractor's carts. Others have been at the open-air workshop where each of them rolling *beedies*, the small leaf-covered cigarettes, which have to be rolled in hundreds per hour, thousands per day, to earn a rupee or two. The work is monotonous, the fingers get calloused by rubbing with dry coarse leaves, the tobacco fumes mingle with the dust to choke one's throat. But now the work is over, and the dark-bodied daughters of the *Adivasi*<sup>1</sup> tribe are now erasing the fatigue from their bodies and minds and souls.

The local train has a compartment at the end reserved for women; and it is now crowded. For this is the evening rush hour when hundreds of thousands of men and women are commuting back to their modest suburban homes.

In the 'Ladies Compartment' there is a spectrum of saris and frocks of different hues, young women and not-so-young women, clerks, typists, stenographers, workers in plastic factories, and workshops manufacturing drugs and milk powder, complicated machine-tools and simple fountain pens. Jampacked, so that they can hardly breathe in the steel-prison with wheels, rushing at break-neck speed, they are passing the time exchanging gossip and scandal, reading newspapers, studying books for morning or evening colleges, or just to amuse themselves, knitting sweaters for their babies or socks for their husbands and boy-friends. They are hungrily eating pop-corn, groundnuts or spiley fried gram out of paper cones, or sucking sugar candy or peppermint tablets, or looking into their little pocket mirrors, at their smiles and frowns, to repair the damage that the working day has wrought on their faces. The stifled air is heavy with the complex aroma of women's bodies pressed against each other, perspiration, cheap perfume and face powder, garlic and onions which they had with their lunch, and *venies* or crescents of jasmine flowers worn in their hair.

While taking the early morning trains to their offices, their thoughts had been focussed on their work, on the whimsicalities,

1. Aborigines.

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idiocyncracies and amorous designs of their bosses and colleagues, on the slimness of their pay packets, and what their trade unions are doing—or not doing—to help them get a decent wage and tolerable working conditions. But, now their thoughts are rushing with the speed of the train to their homes, their families, their husbands, their children, or to the prospects of having husbands and children of their own. And occasionally, in that crowded railway compartment rushing headlong into the sunset, a mysterious personal smile illuminates a work-tired face as someone, some woman, closes her eyes and dreams of a better tomorrow.

This is an unusual and unusually big class, for there are no pupils, only teachers present. This is a conference of women teachers called to press their demands for higher wages, for more security of tenure, for better conditions of work.

They are women teachers, but they are also individuals, housewives who have to run their homes, cook and wash and scrub and look after the children, after they return from the school, or they are unmarried, hoping to collect a dowry and *trousseau* by savings out of their meagre earnings. Considering the enormous worry and strain of their over-work in school and at home, it is remarkable that most of them are still lively and animated, their faces shining with perspiration and with hope and enthusiasm, while they discuss their problems, argue, shout, and agitate.

The patient looks up from the operation table, while the strong smell of chloroform blots out his consciousness, and his last glimpse of reality is a group of masked devils—or are they angels?

Quietly, mechanically, efficiently, the nurses in white smocks assist the surgeon in his delicate and dangerous task, anticipating his every need and requirement, handing over scalpels, knives, scissors, tweezers, stitches, cotton wool, swabs. A few seconds delay may be fatal; a slight mistake, an error of judgment, may have disastrous consequences. It is remarkable that

nurses, who constantly deal and dabble in blood, puss, vomit, urine and excreta, yet manage to look immaculate in their clean white linen and their clean white bed-side smiles. Their smiles which are strictly prophylactic are often misunderstood by susceptible patients, and even by others, as coquettish invitations to forbidden delights.

The nurse, too, is a woman and, after the duty hours are over, she must switch off her bed-side smile (which may even be real) and take a taxi or a bus or a train home, where the ordinary housewife or maid's life awaits her—a husband who may not be employed, children who may or may not be at school, a hoy friend who may or may not be faithful, or parents who keep a strict watch on the hospital hours for her comings and goings. When she takes off the starched white uniform she also discards the angelic halo, and be confronted with the humdrum problems of daily existence—rising prices, rent in arrears, bad-tempered husband, suspicious parents, and gossiping neighbours. And yet the next day when she returns to the hospital, she must leave all these cares, worries, anxieties behind her, and enter the wards with her prophylactic bed-side smile intact.

A woman is a woman, and the woman in India is (with a few exceptions among the idle very-rich) a working woman—be she a peasant, a plantation worker, a day labourer on building construction, a worker in a drug manufacturing more firm, a clerk in an office, or film actress in a studio or a scientific researcher in a laboratory, a stenographer taking dictation, a member of Parliament, a politician or a trade union leader, a Government officer or a business executive giving orders, a Judicial Magistrate delivering judgment or a black-gowned lawyer making legal submissions, a social worker going round the slums, or a doctor, professor, teacher, nurse or air hostess. Or she may be just a housewife, running her household—and it is a full time job—balancing the family budget, making two ends meet in view of the spiralling prices, and doing a hundred odd jobs which Indian men are too tired or lazy to do after they return from their work.

In addition, an Indian woman is often a full-time mother, with no creches, and no baby-sitters to look after the children, who must breastfeed the babies, and when they are older, must sing them lullabies and tell them tales and legends of fantasy and mythology to put them to sleep. That she manages to do all this, and yet retain her liveliness and her interest in life, speaks for her phenomenal inner strength and resilience, her infinite patience, her toughness, and her wisdom.

It is morning time in New Delhi. As the early rays of the sun fall on the dome of the Rashtrapati Bhavan and illuminate the fort-like ramparts of North and South Blocks of the Central Secretariat, a swarm of officers and clerks converge from all sides, using all means of locomotion. They come by trains, buses, scooters, horse-driven tongas, motor cycles, rickshaws, and thousands of them pedal their way on bicycles. Among them are a large number of women—clerks, officers, Members of Parliament and even Ministers.

At exactly ten in the morning, a woman in a plain coloured cotton sari gets ready; if her sons are at home she bids them goodbye, kisses her daughter-in-law and her grandson, then steps out of her house, steps into a car, and is driven to her office at the end of the North Block. Another working woman off to work. She is also an Indian woman, and thousands of years of the history and culture of her country, with its strength and weaknesses, has shaped her. She is a woman and a mother and a grandmother. But she also happens to be the Prime Minister of the country.



## Anatomy Of A Charisma

*The King shall endear himself to the people by bringing them in contact with wealth and doing good to them....*

*In the happiness of his subjects lies his happiness ; in their welfare his welfare ; whatever pleases him he shall not consider as good, but whatever pleases his subjects he shall consider as good....*

—KAUTILYA

“CHARISMA” IS ONE OF THOSE “IN” WORDS IN THE NEW-MINTED vocabulary of modern journalism.

Charisma is defined by one of the dictionaries on my desk as “a quality attributed to those with exceptional quality to secure the devotion of large number of people.” But another, and older, dictionary defines it as “a divine or spiritual gift; miraculous endowment or power.”

Evidently derived from *Karishma*, the Persian word for a miracle or a super-natural phenomenon, this mystical, mythical, inexplicable element has been accepted as the basis of so many charismatic world personalities, whether their charisma was used for good or for evil.

Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru both had a charisma, though one was an ascetic with deep roots in religion, and the other was a socialist who had considerable, though not dogmatic, faith in Marxism. President Kennedy's charisma—which

consisted of his immense wealth, his youthful good looks, and his naive liberalism—charmed the American people, but failed to work on the Cubans who, in Fidel Castro, had a charismatic leader of their own and repulsed the charismatic U.S. President's Bay of Pigs adventure.

And Indira Gandhi, who once shared the Nehru charisma, now is said to possess a charisma of her own.

Whatever its original connotation, charisma implies and introduces the mystical, mythical, non-rational factors in the hum-drum realm of politics, as if some divine power was endowing a politician, a Prime Minister, a President or a Dictator with miraculous popularity. But, actually, like most other social or psychological or pathological phenomena, a charisma, too, is subject to scientific laws, and can be dissected, discussed, analysed and, if necessary, exposed and even de-fused and rendered ineffective like the charismatic atom bomb!

When Shakespeare said "There is a tide in the affairs of men", he obviously had the vicissitudes of politics and politicians in mind. The ebb and flow of the wave of a politician's popularity (whether expressed through a democratic vote or through the mass acceptance of a King or Dictator) is subject to fluctuations of the degree to which he (or she) is able to satisfy the conscious or sub-conscious urges, aspirations and strivings of his (or her) people. Democracy provides the machineries by which rulers, unless they be cussed or confused, are able to gauge their popularity which means the popularity, or otherwise, of their policies and programmes. Indira Gandhi's career as a Prime Minister vividly illustrates this, and exposes the theory that there is some miraculous explanation for the position that she occupies in the democratic power-structure of the country.

In 1959, when she was elected President of the Congress, she proved quite efficient as an organiser, but she was not very popular. For some time (as when she used the Congress to manoeuvre the elected Communist Ministry out of power in Kerala) she came to be identified with the more Rightist elements who did not see eye to eye with Jawaharlal Nehru, her father and her leader, who later on told Editor R.K. Karanjia

of *Blitz* in an interview :

It is well known that I did not groom her or help her in any way to become the Congress President, but she did ; and I am told even by people who do not like me or my policies that she made a very good President. Sometimes she chose a line of her own *against my way of thinking* (Italics mine—KAA), which was the right thing to do... we worked more like political colleagues than a father-and-daughter combination. We agreed on some things. *We differed on some others.* (Italics mine—KAA) Indira has a strong independent mind of her own, as she should have.<sup>1</sup>

But this independent streak which her father rightly did not mind did not make her very popular with the mass of the people—except with the Rightist faction in the leadership which wanted to use the independent-minded daughter against the liberal and progressive policies of her father. That explains why, when she left the Congress presidency, revealed Jawaharlal Nehru, "people have been asking her to take over the party again, even people like Morarji Desai, who do not agree with my approach...."

It was, again, some of these very Congress party leaders who lent their support to Indira Gandhi at the time of her crucial election against Morarji Desai who was regarded as too stiff and unbending in his Rightist postures. The people as a whole rejoiced in her election as Prime Minister, for they instinctively felt that the daughter would resurrect the image—and the policies—of Jawaharlal Nehru. But the plain fact is that, in 1966, she was supported by some of those incorrigible Rightists who were later to part company with her in the Great Divide. It was their hope and their expectation that she would be a puppet Prime Minister in their hands, while proving so very useful for vote-getting in the next year's general elections.

But she was no puppet. She had a mind of her own, not a closed mind like Morarji Desai's and others like him, but an open mind, a receptive mind, a responsive mind. Also she had a feeling heart. And, within days of her assuming the office of

1 R K Karanjia : *The Philosophy of Mr. Nehru*

Prime Minister, she felt and she knew the enormity of the responsibility she had undertaken, and of the economic distress that stalked the country. On the day after she assumed office, she read, in the morning papers, reports of agitation against meagre rice rations in Kerala, starvation deaths in Central India, black market rice selling at the exorbitant price of Rs. 3 per kilo in Nagpur, scarcity conditions in Maharashtra, and Andhra Government employees threatening 'quit work' if their dearness allowance was not increased. In the Punjab (and even in Delhi) the Hindu-Sikh tension was mounting, and in North Eastern India a Naga-like revolt was simmering among the Mizo tribes.

Overwhelmed by the enormity and the profusion of the problems piling up on her desk, she set herself to do whatever little she could do, immediately. But she was neither a miracle-worker nor a dictator. She was the Prime Minister of a democracy run by a slow-thinking, slow-moving bureaucracy, and she felt hamstrung by the rules and the red tape of the *Establishment*. She could only make gestures, provide some earnest of her intentions, a token of action that must follow.

She sent urgent appeals to Madras and Andhra states to rush rice consignments to Kerala on a top priority basis, and made preparations to fly to Kerala to assure its people that the Centre would not forsake them. Later, she flew to Mizo area and broadcast a reasoned personal appeal to them. Again she flew to Calcutta where the Leftist Opposition had threatened to paralyse the city, by a strike to protest against hoarding and the consequent food shortage, but Bengal's Congress Government, provoked by her intrusion in what they regarded as their domain, queered her pitch by arresting the Leftist strike leaders with whom she might have talked. So she came back, and was criticised in Leftist press for allowing bureaucratic notions of prestige come in the way of a direct contact with the Opposition, in the tradition of Gandhi and Nehru. She came back, but she did not forget the eerie look of Calcutta, like a time bomb about to burst. She remembered that there had been no cheering crowds, no applause to welcome the new Prime Minister, only sullen, angry, hungry faces in the streets. No charisma works on

people with empty stomachs.

Then she took the first decisive action that was to be the harbinger of the new Indira policy. She invited the Leftist and Communist leaders to meet her in Delhi, she listened to their version of the situation, she discussed the possible solutions. Finally, as a significant gesture of reasonableness (and against the advice of the shocked Rightists in her Cabinet) she persuaded the Government of West Bengal not to interfere with the silent procession that the Leftists wanted to take out in Calcutta. The unprecedented mammoth procession, led by the leading artists and writers of Bengal, passed off perfectly peacefully, proving that reasonableness ensures a reasonable response. It was the first little impression that Indira was able to make on her own, a slight but significant relaxation of the explosive situation that had been building up over the issue of food shortages. It may be said to be the still small beginning of the charisma of Indira Gandhi—composed of two equal measures of shrewd commonsense and tactful reasonableness.

During the first few weeks after her election, Indira Gandhi was rushing from place to place, for the whole country seemed to be on fire. From the North to the South, from the East to the West, everywhere there was scarcity of food, rising prices, hoarding and profiteering, civil discontent, linguistic demands and dissensions. All the troubles and disorders that, for twenty-two fateful days of the war with Pakistan, had been temporarily and artificially bottled up, were now, after the Tashkent agreement and the unfortunate death of Lal Bahadur Shastri, let loose. It was a Pandora's box that, on her assumption of office, Indira Gandhi had opened.

One of these controversial issues that had been kept pending for many years was the Sikhs' demand for the creation of a Punjabi-speaking State on a linguistic basis. Soon after her election Indira realized that the inevitable was also the desirable end and, with her characteristic sense of political realism, she backed the demand for the further division of Punjab, and the Government announced the decision to create a Punjabi-speaking province. The Sikhs were happy, and so were the people of Haryana who had got the residue as a separate State, even without a struggle. But the communal-minded Hindus led by

elections. Knowing that half of the voters would be women, and a large number would be militant workers or politically conscious peasants, the Congress stalwarts again chose Indira as a mascot and a showpiece, the image of the great and popular Nehru! She had to stomp the country (as her father had done so many times before her) and defend the policies of her Party which were not, necessarily, her own. Being a symbol, she had also, symbolically, to receive punishment on behalf of her party.

The anger, the bitterness, the frustration of the people, their resentment of the arrogant bossism and corruption and neglect of the people's welfare, crystallised in the form of a stone and, while she was addressing an election rally in Bhubaneswar, the stone hit her on her prominent, aquiline and vulnerable nose.

The stone was real, it was hard, it was aimed well, and it hit her on the bridge of her nose which was cracked and started bleeding.

That moment was crucial for Indira—and for India! Indira could have fled, weeping, as an ordinary woman would have done. And that would have been the end of her career, for people cannot trust an ordinary woman to be the Prime Minister of their country. But despite the stinging pain of the fracture, and the bleeding, she continued to speak and, thereby, demonstrated—not only to the people of Bhubaneswar but to the people of India—her indomitable courage, and the courage of her convictions. She did not say, "Forgive them, O Lord", but she did not press for the apprehension and conviction of the man who threw the missile.

On the succeeding days she continued to address meetings after meetings, flying and driving from one place to another, with her nose encased in a plaster. While travelling she would cover the injury with the end of her saree, but while addressing meetings she would squarely face the audience, bandaged nose and all! But for that injury, suffered by Indira Gandhi, the Congress Party would have secured even less number of votes than it actually did. Many voted not for the Congress, but for Indira and for the courage and fortitude—and the good humour—she had displayed after the Bhubaneswar incident.

But the stone had hit the mark not only physically, but also

metaphorically. Indira Gandhi was hurt not only in her nose, but also in her heart. And that night she lay awake for a long time, thinking of the incident and what had provoked it. For she knew that people do not normally throw stones at the leaders of popular parties. Was she heading an unpopular party? What had made the party of Gandhi and Nehru so unpopular with the people? The question gnawed at her heart that night, and on many days and nights after that. But, as the answer became manifestly clear to her, it was already too late to do anything about it. Within a week the country went to the polls, and Indira Gandhi's worst misgivings came true.

At the Centre, the Congress Party came back to power with a limited and limping majority, securing only 281 seats in the Lok Sabha, while five years earlier it had got 364 out of a total of 508. Besides Kerala (which was already ruled by a coalition led by the Communists), five other states fell to different combinations of Opposition Parties. True enough, no other single party was numerically stronger than the Congress, but then for a national party—which, once, rightly claimed to be the nation—it was a severe set-back to lose half a dozen states. It was also a portent and a warning. The implications of the Swatantra Party and the Jana Sangh—and, at the other end of the pole, at least in one state, Bengal, the extremist Marxist Communist—gaining strength at the expense of the Congress were not lost on Indira Gandhi. The tide of Reaction and Extremist Adventurism had set in. Who would risk the fate of King Canute to order back the coming waves? Also the multiplicity of parties, and the various permutations and combinations that could form ministries, though a part of democracy (as in post-war France), still bespoke an era of instability that could be fatal to an already dissent-ridden developing country.

And yet to the objective but progressive, non-party observer, there were compensations in the situation—or so it seemed to one at that time. While reviewing the election results, here are some of the significant gains and losses I noted in the course of my *Last Page*<sup>1</sup> column :

1 *Blitz*, 11th March, 1967

S.K. Patil, the Bombay boss defeated in Bombay by George Fernandes.

Atulya Ghosh, the Boss of West Bengal, loses to a mere railway worker, J.M. Biswas.

Biju Patnaik, the redoubtable industrialist "Boss" of his state, trounced in Orissa.

The Congress capitalist Mahindra defeated in Bombay by the C.P.I. chairman, S.A. Dange.

Half a dozen (Congress) Chief Ministers, lick the dust of defeat in their respective states.

The Union Food Minister,<sup>1</sup> along with almost every state Food Minister, starved of votes as they made the people starve of foodgrains...

Is this the Great Indian Revolution by ballots instead of bullets?

One thing is clear. The people are mad at the inefficiency and corruption of the ruling party. The people are mad—and, in their madness, they have rejected the grain with the chaff; in their madness, they have voted to power reactionary parties which cannot solve their problems because of their vested interests.

The Great Indian Revolution may also be described as the Great Indian Counter-Revolution, looked at from another angle.

The communal Jana Sangh, riding on the wave of Save Cow agitation, have come to absolute power in the Delhi Administration.

Swatantra, a party of vested interests, but playing on the popular theme of Congress regime's corruption, is forming the government in Orissa. In every other state, it has registered substantial gains.

In Madras, the separatist anti-Hindi D.M.K., has swept the polls on the slogan of "Three measures of rice for one rupee." Congress Chief Minister Bhaktavatsalam and other state Ministers have been trounced. Even the mighty Kamaraj the king-maker of Congress has been humbled.

1. P. Subramaniam.



Already, on the eve of the election, I had written of Indira Gandhi :

She could take more decisive steps to rejuvenate the Congress provided the people helped her by dislodging the dead weight in the Party—e.g., S.K. Patil and Atulya Ghosh. By herself she will not be able to dislodge them from their positions of strength. Indira Gandhi will be as weak or as strong as the people will make her.

Now the people, by rejecting many of her colleagues, who had been crippling her progressive initiatives and tainting the Congress image, had actually made her stronger ideologically, while making the Party weaker numerically.

The election which had uprooted many of the old stalwarts, and proved that the voter is no respecter of personalities, had highlighted the increasingly important role that youth of the country, the young voters, had to play in the politics of the country. They were no longer satisfied with being represented by men of another generation. The Communist candidate who defeated the Punjab Chief Minister, the venerable Gurmukh Singh Musafir, was a youth worker. The D.M.K. chose a 28-year old student to defeat the mighty Kamaraj. In Bihar, the students brought about the downfall of the Chief Minister. In South Bombay the young voter was not impressed by the age, experience and attitudes of S.K. Patil. The youth was in evidence everywhere and in all parties—in Jana Sangh, in Swatantra, in S.S.P., P.S.P. and C.P.I. and among C.P.I. (Marxists). Indira Gandhi, observing all these straws in the wind, did not fail to note for future reference that the Congress lost where it depended upon old greyheads with their ancient reputations, but it won in places like Maharashtra where it introduced young blood among its candidates.

With the polarisation of Left and Right forces so clearly indicated by the elections, with the Congress occupying a precarious middle-of-the-road position, there were two alternatives open to the Congress. The first one was envisaged and enunciated by C. Rajagopalachari's call for a Congress-Swatantra-Jana Sangh-D.M.K. "national government" which received serious and sympathetic consideration from people like S.K. Patil in the Congress. "The Congress", Mr. Patil affirmed,

"would always move towards the Right, and never to the Left" and rejoiced in the fact that the elections revealed a trend towards the Right.

Spelling out the Patil view-point, "Narada", the columnist of *Free Press Journal*, wrote :

Faced with the Leftist threat from West Bengal and Kerala, will the Congress come to an agreement with these two parties (Swatantra and Jana Sangh) or either of them ? The difference between the Congress and Swatantra has been thinning for quite some time now, and their combining might be the most effective answer to the Leftist forces. The Swatantra might be able to provide able administrators to the ruling Party whose giants have been rejected by the voters.

The other alternative, of course, was for the Congress to part company with the flabby and corrupt Rightists whose heart was really with the capitalists of the Swatantra or the Hindu communalists of the Jana Sangh, and to stand foursquare by Nehru's policies of Socialism, Secularism and Non-alignment—if necessary to form an alliance or coalition with progressive Leftist parties on the basis of a minimum common programme.

Indira Gandhi (as she later did) would have plumped for this second alternative, but being, above all, a realist and political strategist, she decided to bide her time, because the two trends were almost evenly matched within the Congress. To have insisted on the instant polarisation within the Party she would have to run the risk of losing the prestige and the wide-spread machinery of the Congress to her Opponents—who were also the allies of Reaction ! The same consideration weighed with the Rightists, they too could not take the risk of forcing the issue. So, while both sides clung to their well-defined positions, they compromised by electing Indira Gandhi once again as the Prime Minister, while she allowed herself to be persuaded to allot the all important Finance portfolio (even before she was formally elected leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party) to Morarji Desai, the trusted ally and confidante of capitalists and conservatives ! No wonder, at the time of her re-election she was dressed in pink sari, pink blouse, with

a pinned-up pink rose, and her admirers garlanded her with a garland of pink roses. When she was elected for the first time, the event was hailed as the return of the red rose. Her re-election was symbolized by the diluted pink of compromise !

But, a few hours after her re-election, the Prime Minister said in an interview that the policy of her Government would be "Left-of-Centre". This was taken by many (including Morarji Desai, no doubt) as mere eye-wash for the public.

The very next week, Mr. Chandra Shekhar, a young Congress M.P., quoting from a report prepared by Professor Hazare, Planning Committee Consultant, said in Parliament that Birla House "is controlling the whole country" and revealed that in the last ten years the group of industries controlled by the Birla family had been granted as many as 375 licences !

Quietly, but, as it later appeared, resolutely Indira Gandhi pursued her resolve to give her Party a "Left-of-Centre" orientation. Several of the measures she took were indicative that she had not abandoned the progressive ideology of her father. In the teeth of opposition from the Jana Sangh and at least some of her own communal-minded Party leaders, she secured the election of a distinguished Indian Muslim, Dr. Zakir Hussain, to the highest office of the land. She personally toured the drought-stricken areas to see for herself what succour could be provided. She got a new executive elected for the Congress Parliamentary Party, in which the majority of members were new and mostly young, substituting for the entrenched veterans. And, in dealing with non-Congress (and even anti-Congress) governments in several states, she gave evidence of a breadth of outlook and a sense of democratic federalism that made her to emerge as truly national figure, above Party loyalties.

Addressing the Chief Ministers (several of whom belonged to parties which had opposed the Congress) she disarmed them by welcoming the result of the general election which had brought them to power for it had "generated a peaceful political transformation which had few parallels in the world." Conceding that there could be differences and disagreements between the Centre and the states under coalition governments of opposition parties, she said, "These do exist in a democratic,

changing, free society ; but they need not lead to conflict. We can and should resolve our differences and disagreements through consultation, discussion and persuasion." Her generous, considerate and tactful treatment of opposition governments in some states took away much of their anti-Centre and anti-Congress sting. Thus she adroitly succeeded in maintaining the precarious balance in Centre-state relations, holding in check the fissiparous tendencies that were once supposed to threaten the very unity of India.

But the Prime Minister's main worry was the deteriorating economic conditions in the country. So, as an earnest of the Government's concern for the under-privileged, she persuaded the Congress Working Committee to announce a 10-point programme aimed at achieving the Socialistic Pattern of society already accepted at the Avadi session, some years earlier under the direction of Jawaharlal Nehru. These ten points which were reluctantly and half-heartedly accepted by the elders of the Party, included the nationalisation of commercial banks and the abolition of privy purses. But the inner-party struggle between the Rightists and the Leftists continued, and six months later Morarji Desai succeeded in substantially diluting the ten-points programme by getting the A.I.C.C. to agree to his proposal for the social control of banks—a retrograde measure designed to short-circuit the move for nationalisation.

Even the ten-points were only a reiteration of the socialistic economic policy resolutions which, at the instance and insistence of Jawaharlal Nehru, the Congress had passed, over and over again, beginning with the Resolution on Fundamental Rights and Economic Policy, passed at the Karachi Congress, way back in 1931.

But resolutions, without effective action to implement them, are of little practical utility. The people can't eat them, can't use them for clothes or shelter. The freedom given to private enterprise to raise prices and profiteer out of the people's food, and other necessities, had already sparked off angry and violent mass upheavals. There were strikes, hartals, processions, demonstrations, *gheraos* and *dharnas*, which tended to become more violent and uncontrollable.

Anger and bitterness seldom follow the rules of logic and reason, as Indira Gandhi knew from her reading of her father's Marxist interpretations of World History. Often these outbursts took communal, linguistic, racial and even fascist overtones. At worst they degenerated into just hooliganism. Extremism of different sorts, political as well as anti-social, became popular with the volatile youth and the inflammable and undisciplined lumpen proletariat.

Many years ago, when she was Congress President, she had said that "the people are in a hurry and we cannot afford to lose time. My complaint against the Congress is that it is not going as fast as the people are advancing." If it was true in 1959, it was doubly and dangerously true in 1968. The final warning came when the Congress Party, in February 1969, despite campaigning by Indira Gandhi, lost in Bengal by a wide margin. Out of 280 seats in the Assembly, Congress could secure only 55 seats as against 210 seats won by the United Front led by Marxist Communists. There could not be a more shameful humiliation for the party of Gandhi and Nehru. It was a bold writing on the wall that everyone could read, particularly the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi !

It was against this background that, within the ruling Congress Party, emerged the angry Young Turks, with their urgent warnings against the policies of compromise and capitulation which were responsible for the deplorable conditions in the country and the Party.

Those who give Indira Gandhi the credit—or the discredit—for her Government's eventual decision to nationalise the banks and to abolish the privy purses forget that she acted, when she did, in response to the pressure worked up by the younger and truly Socialist-minded members within her own Congress Parliamentary Party. It was they who were vociferously demanding Socialist action including the nationalisation of Banks.

*Socialist Congressman*, a journal of leftist Congress opinion and a spokesman for the radical Young Turks, admitted candidly on the eve of the Republic Day 1969 :

...the citizen naturally wants to know where stands the

promise of the Constitution to create 'a social order in which justice—social, economic and political—shall inform all institutions of national life.' The citizen knows that we are nowhere near it.... Once in power, the Congress failed to implement the programmes (of Socialist action). The masses voted Congress in two General Elections, gave a warning in no uncertain terms in the third and floored it in the fourth, which all means that Congress must now transform itself into a genuine Socialist party true to its socialist professions.

In March, 1969, Chandra Shekhar, one of the Young Turks, speaking in the Rajya Sabha, accused the Finance Minister, Morarji Desai, of favouring certain firms with which his son, Kanti Desai (who was also his private secretary), was closely associated.

Next month, speaking from the presidential chair of the National Convention of Congressmen for the Implementation of the 10-Point Programme, Chandra Shekhar broadened the base of his criticism, and urged his Partymen to purge the Organisation of those who did not believe in its Socialist policies, and to initiate a dialogue with "all progressive forces whatever their political affiliations" to bring them together for the inevitable confrontation with the reactionary parties, and for the success of Socialist policies and programmes. Earlier, Vasantrao Patil of the Maharashtra Congress had issued a similar call. This was to counter the proposal mooted earlier by S. K. Patil for a coalition of Congressmen with like-minded parties by which he meant the Swatantra and the Jana Sangh.

Matters were now coming to a crucial boiling point. At the Faridabad Session (April 1969) Indira Gandhi decided to speak out plainly and bluntly, even though she was still reluctant to force the split which was becoming increasingly inevitable. The Congress now is at the cross-roads, she said, and must choose between the path which would lead it back to the people and the path which would lead it away from them.

The second alternative of which she spoke was highlighted by the presidential address of Nijalingappa. He favoured alliances with "other parties who believe in democracy"—meaning thereby the same Rightist parties that S. K. Patil called

like-minded. He had already indicated his partiality for these parties by blessing the coalitions with the Swatantra, the Jana Sangh and certain political-minded Rajas and Rajmata.

More significant, however, was his pronouncement on economic policy, for he launched an all-out attack on the Public Sector which gladdened the hearts of the votaries of private enterprise. He called for encouragement to the private sector and expressed satisfaction that Indian industrialists were getting an economic foothold in the more backward countries. At a time when the country and the Congress were agitated over the issue of the rising power of the monopolists, Nijalingappa went on record to say, "It is no use crying hoarse against monopolistic tendencies."

If there was one thing that finally convinced Indira Gandhi that the two trends in the Congress could no longer be reconciled, it was this speech of Nijalingappa, which echoed the views of the redoubtable Morarji Desai. One could not postpone for long the parting of the ways. Dynamic action to implement the Congress pledges to introduce policies and programmes of social justice was becoming imperative in view of the explosive discontent and restlessness of the people, aggravated by their deteriorating economic condition. ("The people can't wait any longer," Indira said about this time). On the other hand, stalwarts of the Right Wing, who controlled the organisational structure of the Congress, seemed determined to resist any move to usher in even the elementary socialistic measures like nationalisation of the scheduled banks. Compromise, the traditional stance of the Congress which could neither move forward nor backward, was no longer possible.

Indira Gandhi gave a clear indication of the way her mind was working when, speaking in the Economic Sub-Committee of the Faridabad Session, she said that the concept of mixed economy had been deliberately accepted under certain conditions; it had now been found that it had resulted in the growth of monopolies and concentration of economic power and widening of disparities. She agreed with those who held that the time had come for re-thinking on economic policy in its entirety including the issue of bank nationalisation. It is interesting in this connection that even in this speech she took a seemingly

conciliatory line, leaving it to the "Young Turks", like K.D. Malaviya, Charanjit Yadav and Mohan Dharja, to declare that bank nationalisation was imperative, the only answer to the country's economic ills, and a test of the Government's concern for the common man.

But she had said enough to warn the Right Wing that an invisible gauntlet had been thrown, and that the Congress was, indeed, once again at the crossroads. It had happened before, and at every critical moment of decision the moderates, the waverers, the weak-willed, the congenitally reactionary elements had walked out of the organisation. But the strong personalities of Gandhi and Nehru had managed a precarious national consensus in which the moderates and the Rightists had paid lip-service to the Socialist ideals, while using their organisational power and factional tactics to thwart their implementation. Indira Gandhi knew, and her opponents also knew, that a compromise was no longer possible, and that the Great Divide was inevitable.

There had been steady devaluation of the prestige and authority of Congress president, so that by now the Party was headed by a provincial satrap, Nijalingappa, who was one of the minor members of the Syndicate of old-time Party bosses. Since several of the Syndicate members like Atulya Ghosh, S.K. Patil and Kamaraj had lost in the elections, a gloom had been cast over their prospects of holding on to power. So when S.K. Patil managed to reach the Lok Sabha by the back-door, winning a by-election, as Kamaraj had managed even earlier, there was short-lived exultation in the ranks of the Syndicate. Since Patil did not receive an invitation to join the Cabinet, he felt free to propound his old thesis of "like-minded" individuals and parties. He issued an ultimatum to the progressives (and, by implication, it was also addressed to the Prime Minister) to get out of the Party. As later events were to prove, a New Delhi political correspondent's forecast was very much to the point: "Now, if there is any quitting of the Congress on the ground of disagreement on policies and programme, as Mr. Patil demanded in his declaration of war on his detractors, it looks as though he and other like-minded Congressmen will have to pack their ideological baggage



and depart."

Meanwhile, with President Zakir Hussain's unfortunate death, there was the need to elect a successor. Vice-President Giri was an independent candidate—expecting a normal "promotion", as had happened in the case of Dr. Zakir Hussain when Dr. Radhakrishnan retired. Before Indira Gandhi could make her choice, the Syndicate was in the field because they needed a man of their ideological affiliations in the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Their choice fell upon N. Sanjiva Reddy, comparatively young Party boss from Andhra who was the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. He was dropped from the Cabinet by Indira Gandhi. He harboured a resentment against her for his fall from grace. The Presidential election, in the Syndicate's calculations, was tied up with the secret arrangements they had already made to replace Indira Gandhi by Morarji Desai. In both these eventualities they had been assured of more than tacit support from their "like-minded" friends in the Jana Sangh and the Swatantra Party.

This is where the situation stood when the Congress stalwarts gathered for an A.I.C.C. meeting in Bangalore, President Nijalingappa's home-ground. Ironically enough, in the absence of the Prime Minister, the Working Committee meeting was held in the famous Glass House in the picturesque Lal Bagh. The main item on the agenda was to consider the overall economic policy in the light of a well-argued case made out by some of the "Young Turks" among M.P.'s for radical steps to implement the promises and pledges given to the people. The complacent Bosses, however, contemptuously set aside the note prepared by the five young M.P.'s and, taking advantage of the absence of Indira Gandhi, who was held up in Delhi due to an indisposition, they tried to side-track the issues by considering a non-committal, piously-worded draft resolution prepared by the General Secretary Sadiq Ali. The Syndicate Bosses were not interested in economic issues, they wanted to consolidate their position on the impending Presidential election. Someone suggested that the discussion be postponed till the arrival of the Prime Minister.

It was then that Sadiq Ali told them that the Prime Minister, through Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, had sent for their considera-

tion a note prepared by her after studying Sadiq Ali's draft and the proposals of the young M.P.'s. She said that she had "jotted down a few stray thoughts in a hurry"—but the echo of these words would resound through the length and breadth of the country. To some of the sedate and elderly gentlemen in the Glass House this note, when read out to them, was a major provocation. The angriest of the whole lot was Morarji Desai who said that the Prime Minister had no business to place before the Committee the proposals like immediate bank nationalisation, with which he, as Finance Minister, did not agree, and which he could not support.<sup>1</sup> Others cried out that Indira Gandhi's "stray thoughts", if implemented, would surely lead to a Communist take-over. The battle-lines for crucial struggle for the body and soul of the Congress were formed. Now they knew that the little lady was quite serious about Socialism. Therefore, she must be controlled or eliminated.

When she arrived on the scene, the Syndicate could muster only a few votes in the Working Committee, and the majority supported the resolution based on her proposals which, themselves, were inspired by the note of the young M.P.'s. Faced by defeat on the economic issues, the Syndicate seemed to retreat, and in a hypocritical speech Morarji Desai moved the resolution, though it was clear even from his halting speech that he had no intention of implementing any of the proposals.

The iron had entered the soul of the Syndicate, and they decided in secret councils to carry out their plan of getting their nominee installed in the President's House, and then to confront Indira Gandhi with the support of their "like-minded" friends.

But they had underrated their adversary. Indira Gandhi had stolen their thunder by her "stray thoughts". She had outmanoeuvred them, and put them on the defensive, before they could launch their offensive. Instead of fighting on the issue of personalities, she had chosen to raise the more important issue of "Socialism Now" because, she knew, the mass of the people

1. Morarji Desai was reported to have said, "As long as I am Finance Minister, this cannot be implemented. If the Prime Minister wants to do it, she will have to get another Finance Minister."

would be on her side. It was a shrewd political strategy, but also it was an act of statesmanship. It was a revolutionary step taken without violence, and without fanfare, and she had placed the responsibility for the inevitable split in the Congress Party squarely on the shoulders of her adversaries.

The details of the Split are well-known. First came the dismissal of Morarji Desai as Finance Minister (he did not have the confidence of the Prime Minister that he would carry out agreed Socialist policies and programmes). As an earnest of the new policies, the fourteen leading banks were nationalised by a Presidential Ordinance, and a Bank Nationalisation Bill was presented to the Lok Sabha, and passed unanimously the same day; the Rightists, caught off guard, choosing to be absentees. Then came the "Free Vote" in the Presidential election that formalised the Split in the Congress, and the ultimate victory of V.V. Giri, the nominee of Indira Gandhi, which signified that, for the time being at least, the Rightist coup had failed.

But what is not so well publicised is the popular upsurge that greeted the Banks take-over. It was as if the flood-gates of the people's enthusiasm were suddenly opened. No one was naive enough to imagine that the nationalisation of banks, by itself, could solve all the economic problems of the country. And yet it was a symbol of change, a hopeful portent of better things to come. The people knew that at last the Government, under Indira Gandhi, was serious about Socialism, and the removal of Morarji Desai reassured the people that the formidable road-blocks were being removed by a little lady with grit and guts. Throughout the week, processions of workers, white-collar employees, scooter-drivers, rickshaw-pullers, artisans and students, continued to march to the Prime Minister's residence to reassure her of their support in the struggle for Socialism. I think all her hesitations, all her wavering, all her balancing of the pros and cons, were swept off by those demonstrations of the popular mood, and of the people's will. By one act of courage, Indira Gandhi had enthused and inspired the people, filled them with hope, and in their turn the people had inspired Indira with their love and their faith.

I went to Delhi during those heady days and saw proces-

sions of students, journalists, clerks, taxi-drivers, scooter-drivers, tongawallas, hawkers, artisans, labourers, building workers, textile operatives, and peasants from the near-by villages, converging on the roundabout near the Prime Minister's House. They came with flags flying, and banners held high, singing and beating drums, raising slogans that rent the sky.

They squatted on the lawn in the roundabout in disciplined ranks—and they craned their necks to see their Prime Minister in khadi sari and *chappals* walking out of her house (It was not a palatial residence, the people duly noted) and coming straight to meet them, her people.

And as she sat amidst them, talking to them about the little step towards their goal and of its great significance for her, and for them, talking to them, not talking down to them, not in a demagogue's rhetoric phrases, but in simple Hindi words, words that every one could understand, I knew then that the charisma of Indira Gandhi was the light of faith and hope that she had kindled in the eyes and the hearts of the people with one imaginative, dramatic, dynamic little step. She had listened and responded, to the urgent, pleading, angry, demanding voice of the people, and now they were listening to her, to what more she could and would do for them, and what she expected them to do for her, and for themselves !

## In The Centre Of The Stage

*The good of man must be the end of the science of politics.*

—ARISTOTLE

*The difference between a politician and a statesman is that a politician thinks of the next election and a statesman of the next generation.*

—JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE

THE FORWARD MOVEMENT OF THE CONGRESS TOWARDS SOCIAL transformation which had been blocked by too many compromises for too long was at last restored. The subsequent tragicomic drama played out in the Congress organisation, the exchange of bitter and angry letters, the Constitutional hair-splitting, the charade of unity moves, the tangential attack on Government's foreign policy by Congress Right which is indistinguishable from the "like-minded" Swatantra and Jana Sangh, the Requisition and the Dismissals, all these would have been comically meaningless, but for the very significant fact that they were signs and symbols of that very ideological polarisation which, so many had hoped, could be avoided but which had now become inevitable.

At the centre of the stage, where this great historical drama was being played out, sat a frail, delicately-built but determined young-old lady—a dutiful yet independent-minded, daughter

treading the "Miles to Go" to reach the destination which her father had set before her, a leader of her people who had at last listened to the inner voice of the people's aspirations, even as her childhood heroine Joan of Arc once listened to "the voices" of God!

What did she think about it all and about herself, about the ideological legacy of her father, and the multiplicity of problems that had fallen on her slender shoulders immediately after the split in the Party? Would she win through? Or would she lose? For those arraigned against her were stalwarts of the political game. What gave her confidence and strength? For that it was necessary to peep into the mind of Indira Gandhi and to see how it responded to the crucial challenge of that moment in her political career, and in her country's history. That was the main objective of my journey to New Delhi in November 1969.

It was an emotional moment for me, because the room in the South Block of the Secretariat was the same where I had so many interviews with Jawaharlal Nehru. But, I noted, the position of the table had been changed so that Indira Gandhi sat in front of an open window directly facing a portrait of her father on the wall.

I noticed the orange border on the chocolate-coloured handloom sari, the black beads, a little more grey in her hair, and the dark rings round her sparkling eyes. A personal friend of the Prime Minister had already warned me of the signs of strain, sleeplessness and tension I would find on the familiar, handsome face, for in those hectic, excitement-packed days she did not get more than two or three hours of sleep.

And yet as she rose to greet me with a smile, there was the look of her father on her face—the same aquiline nose, the same determined chin, the same set of healthy teeth, the same brooding compassion in her eyes.

I had come to probe the depths of the Prime Minister's mind, and so I chose to open my interview, which developed into a dialogue and a discussion, with a philosophical, rather, than a political question.

"Are you an optimist?" I asked and reminded her of the poverty, the ignorance, the fanaticism, the incidence of violence, the communal riots that have become so much a part of the Indian scene that, even after 22 years of freedom, we tended to take them for granted. "Are you not depressed, disheartened and defeated by all this?"

"I am a very practical person," she replied, "I look at life from the point of view of what can be done. To be depressed does not help. It takes away from your ability to do things. Therefore, I am an optimist."

Then she added something which had the conviction and faith of her father. "Also, I am an optimist because I have infinite faith in the people of India and in their capacity to overcome all these many difficulties and problems. There has been no country, and no period of history, where people have not faced problems. But after all, the problems are faced, solved, and that period passes. This is a process of life; there would be no progress but for the challenge of problems."

I reminded her that the problems—specially of poverty and ignorance—were acuter in India than anywhere else.

She agreed that it was so. "Poverty is something that overshadows our lives. It darkens everything that happens. But I have no doubt that we shall overcome poverty and that it will go, though it will be a long, slow, dull, laborious process. We should not expect to achieve it in a sudden or dramatic way."

"What about ignorance, superstition? We have a lot of it, you know?"

"Ignorance and superstition," she replied, "are also directly connected with poverty. If you get rid of it, you get rid of ignorance and superstition. And if we get rid of ignorance, we would go farther ahead with the removal of poverty."

"But how do we try to remove it? Removal of poverty and ignorance through education is a slow process."

The Prime Minister agreed and added, "Moreover, the education which we have today seems to be only concerned with imparting information. Education should concern itself with changing the attitude of the mind."

I shifted the conversation to the political issues which were then uppermost in the minds of the people—and in the mind of

the Prime Minister.

"In view of the steady deterioration in Congress affairs"—and I mentioned the scaling down of ideological commitments, and of socialist objectives, the scramble for power, the opportunist defections, and the virtual split in the organisation, among other symptoms, and then asked—"do you still think that the Congress can be rejuvenated and revived to play a positive role in national politics?"

She was prepared for this question and replied without hesitation. "Obviously I feel that the Congress can be rejuvenated. It can be done by clarifying the issues through a wide-ranging debate, both within the party and outside. This is our aim in calling an early meeting of the A.I.C.C. 'But, unfortunately, some people are trying to give it a colouring as if it was a factional, or a personal, fight for power. Nor is it a question of my being there or not there.

"The Congress can be rejuvenated only if it goes back to the people, where it started really. Any political party must be on the move constantly. It simply cannot stay where it is. You have to be dynamic, vital, as a party and not only as individuals. And vital at every level—region, state, district, taluka, town or *mohalla*."

With Chandra Shekhar's call for a United Front of all Progressives in mind, I asked, "Can't your appeal be wider to embrace other progressive parties, and those who do not belong to any party, in the process of social transformation which was the original objective of the Congress?"

She said that those "who subscribe to our programmes and our methods since we are committed to democratic socialism are welcome to work with us."

I countered, "If they fully shared your beliefs, they become a part of the Congress. Even otherwise, can't there be co-operation among like-minded parties? Can't they be involved in the wide-ranging debate in the country, and in the implementation of this programme of social transformation? I am sure many non-Congressmen, and non-Party men, share your objectives."

She referred to her sitting round a table with representatives of other parties to think about problems of national integration.



"If we do not have the cooperation of political leaders and intellectuals, it is impossible to bring about such integration. I do not want to shirk Governmental responsibility and duty. But it is not really possible to be effective unless you can get full public help. Like this, there are many more areas in which we should try to secure the cooperation of other parties and individuals who broadly agree with our objectives."

One of my longest questions was deliberately phrased to provoke her and to get some fire-works: "Your opponents are saying that you are no more a Socialist than they are, and that Bank Nationalisation was only a tactical move to gain popularity among the masses, and to gain control of the Congress organisation. In support of their contention, they adduce the fact that you have not followed it up with any other Socialist measures, not even to the extent of implementing the 10-point economic programme passed years ago by the Congress. Can you clarify the position spelling out what led to Bank Nationalisation, and what further steps do you propose to take along the same path? What are your principled differences with leaders of the so-called Syndicate? They claim to be supporters of the Socialist programme of the Congress. *Are they?*"

But Indira Gandhi proved too astute and sophisticated a politician to fall into a journalist's trap and to descend to the level of her opponents.

"I think the final assessment will have to be left to the people and, ultimately, to future historians. In a democratic society the assessment of parties and individuals can be made only by a process of discussion and debate so that the people can see who stands for what, not merely in theory, or by profession, but also in practice.

"My feeling has been that both the party and the Government had entered a phase of immobility. In the Faridabad and Bangalore sessions, two contrasting points of view were brought to the surface...."

I hastened to interject: "Did the Presidential address of Mr. Nijalingappa at Faridabad represent one of the two contrasting view-points?"

The Prime Minister replied that she had said as much in

her letter, and to many other people. In fact she said so in her speech at that very session.

As for the Bank Nationalisation, she said, it was "undertaken as an earnest effort to save the Party from creeping paralysis. The response which it generated and the consequences which show that the wider social, economic and political measures which I have in mind did produce, and can produce, a tremendous response from the mass of the people.

"You have asked about other Socialist measures. All these measures are extremely complex and serious. But," she added, with a new fire of resolution and determination in her eyes, "come what may, we shall not falter in implementing these programmes."

"Any political party," she said, "must be alive and respond to the needs and aspirations of the people. And, therefore, I go back to the old point that renewal and change are the only constants of life. We have to respond to them, and the future will judge who stood for change and who stood for the rituals or the technicalities and legalities of the situation."

"You mean our good friends, the members of the Syndicate who are so engrossed in legalities and technicalities?"

"I do not really like these labels like the 'Syndicate'. That is why I scrupulously avoid using them."

I persisted, "Whether I say 'Syndicate', or say Messrs Nyalingappa, Morarji, Patil etc., the point is, what are the differences of principle which have arisen between the two groups? I would like to highlight this point before the public so that they can judge for themselves whether it is factional fight or ideological."

"Of course," she replied, "it was all highlighted by the issue of Bank Nationalisation. Morarjibhai will contradict it if anyone says he was against Bank Nationalisation. But his earlier statements were made in the full Working Committee meetings...."

I had met Mr. Jagjivan Ram a little while earlier, and I said that he had told me that Morarji Desai had repeatedly expressed his opposition to Bank Nationalisation in the Cabinet.

"Why bring in the Cabinet?" The Prime Minister would not be caught off her guard. "I must not discuss what happen-

ed in the Cabinet. But Morarjibhai's thinking is well known. Before his resignation was accepted he told me 'I am a far bigger Socialist than you are, because I have given away all my money.' But being a Socialist does not mean that you yourself have or do not have some things. I may tell you that it has been suggested to me by many people earlier that I should create a trust and avoid tax. ("Like Morarji?" I thought—KAA) It is simply not right. Why should I avoid Government Tax? Many people have written to me, and the Congress President also told me, that I should have told Morarji to implement Bank Nationalisation, and if he did not do so, then I should have asked him to leave the Government. But the question was that of the way of his thinking, not just in one matter but in many matters."

Then she added, "Apart from basic differences on policies, there were also differences about the method of working."

"Such as?" I enquired.

She catalogued these objectionable methods of work. "In the Congress, there has been a certain amount of Bossism. It has a certain amount of bogus membership. It has rather peculiar ways of functioning which are not democratic methods. Moreover, we have a few people who think that they are the Congress. My quarrel is with this concept. But again I say, let the people judge, and decide!"

I told her that not only in the Congress and in India, but all over the world, there is a lot of confusion about what "Socialism" means and asked, "What do you mean by Socialism? Do you mean Scientific Socialism? Or some other kind of Socialism? Do you agree with your ~~own~~ definition of a Socialist order as 'a classless society with economic justice and opportunity for all, a society ~~operating~~ on a planned basis. ... Everything that comes in the way have to be removed, gently if possible, forcibly if ~~it~~ necessary.'"

She replied that, so far as she was concerned, she was with this definition.

"Then," I asked, "you do believe that some things to be removed forcibly if necessary?"

"Yes—I do, if forcibly means the use of Constitutional force."

"Then, don't you think these road-blocks in the path of Socialism should be identified?"

"These road-blocks", she affirmed, "are always the vested interests. Not only the vested interests of Big Business; sometimes, the conservatism and inertia of the poor could also be a road-block."

When I asked her about the relationship between the Party and the Government, she said, "I do agree with you that the Government should function with organisational support. We are told the organisation has supported Bank Nationalisation whole-heartedly. But I will ask one question. What has the Party done about it? In how many places, and in what manner, have they taken it to the people to explain what it means, how it was a party programme, and where it can lead. But actually none of it was done. If this had been done, it was not the Government but the Party which would have gained more power."

Then she referred to the Party's role in creating communal harmony. "This can be done through a thorough educational process among the people. The Party can take up this education of public opinion. Has it been done?" She had just come from the Congress Parliamentary Party Executive meeting, and obviously referring to the heated debate she said, "Here you have division of opinion even on foreign policy."

"If I may say so," I got a chance to say, "the attack is really on your secular policy."

"Yes, now a new theory has arisen that by talking about minorities, the Government creates or provokes riots! This is a most extraordinary statement. To such persons I shall say: Why don't you come out in the open and say you do not approve of the basic Congress policies?"

"But," she added, "whenever we pass a resolution, they support it in the open...."

"And oppose it in private?" I commented. "Why don't you identify and expose these people within your party who attack your fundamental policies of Socialism, Secularism and Non-alignment?"

Her reply was significant and had the ring of finality. "They have been identified."

And I understood her to mean that recent events had served not only to identify them, but to expose them in their true colours, before the court of public opinion.

We had been talking for an hour and a half—originally, I had been given thirty minutes. At last the Prime Minister looked at her watch, and said with a smile.

"And now, Mr. Abbas, I must throw you out."

And suddenly I remembered that those were exactly the last words her father had spoken to me at the conclusion of my interview with him in that very room.

When this interview took place (November 5, 1969) technically there was only one Congress, but for all practical purposes it had split into two irreconcilable factions. They talked to each other only through statements and counter-statements which were always issued at some hour past midnight to give the other party no time to reply to it in the next morning's newspapers. The supporters of Indira Gandhi had already started collecting signatures on a Requisition urging an early session of the A.I.C.C. which might elect a new President instead of Nijalingappa.<sup>1</sup> So Indira's faction came to be called the Requisitionists, while the Syndicate and its allies were called Organisation Congress, until later when the Requisitionists proved their numerical superiority both in the requisitioned A.I.C.C. and in Parliament and then it was called Ruling Congress or Congress (R).

Sniping went on from both sides—Kamaraj forced Subramaniam out of the Tamilnadu Congress, and later Nijalingappa used this as pretext to drop him from the Working Committee, along with Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed. Indira Gandhi pruned her Cabinet by getting rid of some Ministers including the Railway Minister, Ram Subhag Singh. Two days after my interview, Nijalingappa agreed to have lunch at Mrs. Gandhi's place—the vegetarian dishes, duly

1. Eventually they had secured 408 signatures out of a total A.I.C.C. membership of 708 members.

publicised, must have been delectable but the "unity talks failed." And, as a consequence, on November 12, Nijalingappa took the unprecedented, and slightly ludicrous step, of expelling Indira Gandhi from the Party and directing the Congress Parliamentary Party to elect a new leader, while he knew all along that the Prime Minister enjoyed the support of a big majority among the Congress M.P.'s, who categorically stated that "the action taken by Nijalingappa is illegal and has no validity." Also there were spontaneous demonstrations when people, in their thousands, marched to the Prime Minister's House to express the popular resentment against the so-called expulsion order. Indira met the demonstrators, and they found her cheerful, smiling and confident, despite the "crucifixion" she had gone through!

On the same day, Indira Gandhi addressed a movingly worded "Letter to Congressmen", copies of which were posted to every member of the All India Congress Committee. Beginning with the statement, "I do not want a split in our great national organisation", she surveyed the political perspective, raising the controversy to a higher level of dialectics. "Outside the narrow confines of our party, great and turbulent changes are taking place in the minds and hearts of our people. There are new trends of thought. There are new aspirations. And there are new tensions apart from other older tensions. Political consciousness has matured and deepened among the masses...."

She frankly analysed the malaise of the Party. "There is a tendency to be influenced by the forces of reaction, revivalism, and vested interests...frankly (the Congress) no longer commands in full the loyalty and emotions of the nation in the past. It must recognise that it cannot discharge the role of leadership unless it redefines its position sharply in relation to the competing points of view in the country—and it can serve as an effective instrument of the national purpose only if it revitalizes its membership and its methods of functioning."

On November 19 Indira Gandhi became 52 years old. There was a touching demonstration of the common people's affection and esteem, as thousands of people, men, women, and school children, came to offer birthday greetings to Indira

Gandhi. They expressed their sentiments with flowers and with songs. But it was more than a mere sentimental, or conventional, gesture—there were militant undertones of a people awakened, who recognised that, at last, and again since Jawaharlal Nehru, a leader had arisen who was committed to the cause of the common people. It revived the memories of the old days of Gandhi and Nehru, when the people were not alienated from their leaders.

That week is still remembered as a week of demonstrations—and sometimes counter-demonstrations—in New Delhi. The Jana Sangh tried to make political capital out of the situation by taking out a procession demanding the Prime Minister's resignation. But much more impressive was a youth demonstration when 15,000 young militants marched on Parliament, with flags and banners, demanding a solution to the unemployment problem. These demonstrators carried (and later burnt) effigies of the Swatantra, Jana Sangh and Syndicate leaders, with such slogans scrawled in bold big letters across them: SYNDICATE—ENEMY OF PEOPLE and YOUTH FIGHT AND DEFEAT SYNDICATE.

This upsurge of conscious and militant youth must have roused the spirit of Indira Gandhi, but she had cause to reflect on the vagaries of the popular mood when another mammoth demonstration engulfed the Parliament House, and she learnt that it was the Haryana people agitating for the merger of Chandigarh with their state. The people, evidently, still had to learn what issues were worth agitating about!

But the real birthday gift came next week when the requisitioned meeting of the A.I.C.C. was held on November 22 and 23, and overwhelmingly endorsed the stand of Indira Gandhi, expressing full faith in her dynamic leadership, and her progressive policies. It was a unique and historic gathering of Congressmen from every corner of the country. Despite the fact that at least some members, out of their loyalty to the Syndicate, refused to respond to the Requisition, it was attended by a record number of 441 out of a total of 709 members, while no other meeting of the A.I.C.C. in many years had been attended by more than 50 percent of its members. The significance of this large turn-out lay in the fact that the Bosses had failed to hold back the enthusiastic participation of the mem-

bers, despite all efforts and manoeuvres to declare the session "illegal", to threaten the participants with dire consequences and to put all kinds of pressures by some Pradesh Committees (e.g. in Tamil Nadu, Mysore and Gujarat) to discourage their members from coming to Delhi. A touching demonstration of the common people's faith in the "New Congress" was the decision of the Shoe Shine Boys Union to offer free shoe-shine to A.I.C.C. members. There was a sense of dynamism and urgency about this A.I.C.C. session which had been lacking in the Congress of late. Subramaniam presided over the session but it was Indira Gandhi who dominated the proceedings, and her declaration of independence from the stranglehold of the Old Bosses of the Syndicate was greeted with thunderous applause.

It was not really a Split, it was shedding of a part of the leadership which had become irrelevant, and held back the Organization from fulfilling its role of creating a Socialistic Pattern of Society for the people of India.

Despite the wails and lamentations of the old and tired politicians who saw the heavens falling to proclaim the end of the World, it was not for the first time that the Congress, under the compulsions of history, had shed the out-dated ideology, policies and programmes of an older leadership. It had happened when the Moderates and Liberals had been driven out of the Congress when Mahatma Gandhi, with his dynamic slogan of Non-Violent Non-Co-Operation, had appeared on the scene. It had happened again when Jawaharlal Nehru presided over the Lahore Congress and uttered the dreaded word : Socialism. Like his daughter many years later, he too had been reprimanded by seven of the senior stalwarts—including Sardar Patel, C. Rajagopalachari and J.B. Kripalani—who complained against Nehru : "There is a regular and continuous campaign against us treating us as persons whose time is over, who represent and stand for ideas that are worn out and that have no present value, who are only obstructing the progress of the country and who deserve to be cast out of the position which they undeservedly hold."

This was written in 1936, but there could not be a more fitting epitaph to commemorate the exit of the Bosses from the



rejuvenated and revitalized Congress.

At the *Faridabad Session* of the Congress (the same session where the two divergent points of view of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and President of the Congress Nijalingappa became apparent) there was a dramatic conflagration, when the Congress Pandal was set ablaze by a short-circuit in the air-conditioning plant installed for the convenience and comfort of the Congress Ministers and leaders. According to one news agency, "The dais, which could hold the biggest show on earth, was burnt within a few minutes...the first things to be burnt down were the mattresses, the giant-sized cow-pillows, carpets, and costly electric fittings."

The conflagration—how it started, what it destroyed—was symbolic and prophetic. And it did not take more than seven months for the prophecy to come true.

When Indira Gandhi went to Parliament, a small but significant chunk of her Party members had defected to the Opposition benches. She must have felt saddened by the inevitable that had happened. But she must have also felt freer and stronger. She knew of the difficulties ahead, of the many problems unsolved—to mention only two, there was the separatist agitation in Telangana, and communal riots (of all places), in Ahmedabad where Gandhiji had lived for so many years!—and, specially, the crushing burden of poverty that lay like a curse on the land. But at least now she would be free to tackle these problems. She was unshackled at last. Or was she?

was to run the whole country, after the death of Jawaharlal Nehru.

The next morning, at the breakfast table, I enquired of Indira Gandhi if the Prime Minister's enquiry about cereals and eggs was a joke, and she replied, "No, it is no joke to run the house of a hospitable and large-hearted man like my father on the fixed salary that he gets!" Then she told me that quite often the salary is not enough to pay the grocer's and other monthly bills, and at the end of the year there is a substantial amount owing to different creditors, and that is paid only out of the yearly royalties that he received from the foreign publishers of his books.

Indira Gandhi, as a house-wife, already knew about "deficit financing" of kitchen expenses from the days she was running the modest household of her husband, Feroze Gandhi, who was then getting only a three-figure salary from *The National Herald*, but shared some of the generous impulses of his father-in-law.

But now, as Finance Minister (a portfolio that she took over from Morarji Desai) she had to run a kitchen, as large as the whole country, and provide bread and a bowl of rice (if not cereals and eggs) to a family of five hundred million people!

Indira Gandhi heralded her Finance Ministership with the dynamic and historic decision to nationalise the leading banks by a presidential decree. It was a socially significant step that would have made the term of office of any other Finance Minister memorable but Morarji Desai, well-known apologist and defender of privilege and profit, was not destined to have the honour.

While announcing the decision in Parliament on July 19 (it had already been broadcast to the nation two days earlier) she said: "The government believes that public ownership of the major banks, for which there has been widespread public support, will help in the most effective mobilisation and deployment of national resources so that our objectives can be realized with a greater degree of assurance."

She took this bold step, on her own initiative, despite opposition and discouragement from Finance Ministry officials

and the Reserve Bank governor. She did it after consultation with select officials sympathetic to her views, and a special room was allotted to them where they worked, on drafting the Ordinance which was to announce the banks take over. The whole operation was carried out so swiftly and secretly that on Saturday, a senior Cabinet Minister was heard saying tauntingly, "Three days have passed since the Prime Minister took over Finance, but there is no nationalisation so far." Within an hour he was called to an emergency meeting of the Cabinet, where the Prime Minister secured the unanimous approval of all her colleagues for The Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Ordinance, 1969. Now that Morarji had gone, even the waverers and secret scoffers of the idea of bank-nationalization, joined the chorus of congratulations for the Prime Minister's bold step in issuing this Ordinance.

That night, as she announced it on the Radio, the Syndicate stalwarts were taken by surprise and confusion, but the mass of the people were over-joyed. It was the most popular ordinance ever issued—or, perhaps, the only popular ordinance that evoked the unqualified approval and support of the common people.

Thus by one stroke of the President's pen, Indira Gandhi fired the imagination of the entire people, proved her *bona fides* about fulfilling the long-standing promises and election pledges of the Congress, gained the confidence of the genuine leftists, the impatient youth and the progressive intellectuals, and at the same time confounded her opponents, critics and detractors, virtually pulling the carpet from under their feet. It was one of those acts which are practical as well as idealistic; which are good strategy as well as good tactics. And the unexpected quickness with which it was accomplished—and the suspenseful manner in which it was sprung on friends and foes alike—spoke of imaginative and skilful sense of timing which is as useful in politics as in music and dancing.

Having nationalised fourteen leading Banks—the biggest (Central Bank) with deposits of 433 crores, and the smallest (Bank of Maharashtra) with 73 crores—she struck a blow at the Big Business houses which had monopolised the capital

reserves and resources of these banks for their own acquisitive purposes. For instance, Tatas controlled Central Bank of India ; Birlas, United Commercial Bank ; Dalmia-Jains, Punjab National Bank ; and several of the Gujarati big business houses collectively controlled the Dena Bank. Even the Reserve Bank had admitted that the enormous concentration of economic power in the hands of a family or group having a controlling interest in a bank is often exercised in undesirable ways, injurious to the public interest.

An economic survey of 20 leading banks showed that a total of 188 persons served as Directors on the boards of these 20 banks. These 188 bank directors, between them, held 1452 directorships of other companies, and the total number of companies under them was 1100. It was not surprising that this class of people, mostly represented by the Swatantra Party, were not happy with Indira Gandhi and with bank nationalisation. The large funds that they had used to acquire private profit and privilege were now to be used for the public good—to finance the rural sector of the economy, to assist the small entrepreneur, to lend money to farmers for the purchase of tractors and to taxi-drivers for the purchase of vehicles.

There was another significant aspect of the bank nationalisation which was pointed out by the Economic Specialist of a leftist Delhi weekly<sup>1</sup> :

The private commercial banks have helped the growth of black money. Bogus accounts have been operated in a number of banks. Not only this. By over and under-invoicing through the banks, the country has been utilised for the bogus and fraudulent business transactions and purchase of *benami* shares. The nationalisation of major banks will go a long way to check them.

In 1948, the Reserve Bank of India was established and in 1955 Imperial Bank of India was converted into the State Bank of India which, thanks to a far-sighted economic vision that had spread into the countryside, into small towns and even some villages. Then the Life Insurance business was

1. *Mainstream*, New Delhi, July 28, 1969.

taken over. The nationalisation of the fourteen scheduled banks was thus an inevitable follow-up measure, but the sympathisers of Big Business had managed to postpone it from year to year—till Indira Gandhi decided to act.

Bank nationalisation was a significant step forward in the direction of using the economic resources of the country for people's welfare, instead of allowing them to be controlled and exploited in the interests of Big Business. But land reform was the core of an over-all economic policy designed to radically transform the mass of Indians living in the villages. Unfortunately for Indira—and for India—this was in the domain of the state legislatures and state governments. The Centre could only lay down the broad policy, urging and pressurising the states to usher in the agreed land reforms speedily and seriously. The state Chief Ministers, several of them representing interests of Kulaks or the rich and influential farmers able to take advantage of tractor-farming and chemical fertilizers, had been dragging their feet for years and years, while Congress went through the yearly ritual of passing resolutions repeatedly emphasizing the urgency of introducing the full measure of land reforms.

Soon after taking over the Finance portfolio, Indira Gandhi called the Congress Chief Ministers to New Delhi and urged them to complete the land reforms in their respective states, to give land to the landless, to place ceilings on land holdings, and to extend the benefits of the Green Revolution which had so far eluded the vast mass of the rural poor. On the contrary, it had resulted in widening the disparities between the rich farmers and the landless labourer or the small farmer with his ridiculously small holding, which was not economically viable in this age of expensive mechanized farming.

The Chief Ministers made solemn but hypocritical promises which they had no intention of fulfilling. Either they were *Kulaks* themselves, and land reforms would seriously and adversely affect their class interests, or they depended upon the rich farmers for their votes and for donations to their election funds. Four years later, despite the fact that most of the State governments are now headed by persons who call

themselves strong supporters of Indira Gandhi, their attitude to land reforms is as equivocal and half-hearted as ever.

The Congress session that was held in Bombay under the presidency of Jagjivan Ram, gave an opportunity to Indira Gandhi to get her message across to the grass-roots Congressmen. Once again they were asked to vote for the oft-debated 10-point economic programme, which they did dutifully and ritualistically. But some of these points were selected for immediate implementation—including the nationalisation of import and export trade, a ceiling on urban property, ending of monopolies, and land reforms to be completed on an urgent priority basis. Defending the Mixed Economy in an interview given during the Congress session in Bombay, the Prime Minister stated somewhat apologetically that "In India it would be difficult to change entirely and suddenly what we have been committed to—i.e., the concept of a mixed economy." But she defined the respective functions of the two Sectors—the Private Sector to make money profits, while the Public Sector aimed at profits in terms of the social good!

She made no secret of the fact that her own sympathies—and her whole-hearted concern—were for the Social objectives of the Public Sector.

Indira Gandhi once again outlined her—and her Government's—economic objectives in her speech, while presenting her first Budget to Parliament on February 28, 1970. "It is necessary to devise policies," she said, "which reconcile imperatives of growth with concern for the well-being of the needy and the poor. Measures have to be devised which, while providing welfare, also add momentum to productive forces. Any severance of the vital link between the needs of growth and of distributive justice will produce stagnation or instability."

The Men of Money had hoped that, having accomplished her political purposes with bank nationalisation, the Prime Minister-cum-Finance Minister would allow the Secretaries and experts of the Finance Ministry to prepare a budget for her along the usual lines which would make a gesture of providing some funds for social welfare, without undermining the basis of the economy. Budget-making was supposed to be too compli-

cated a job for her.

The budget did not set the Ganga or the near-by Jamuna on fire. It had no spectacular *Socialistic measures* like the nationalisation of banks and, in a sense, provided an anti-climax. Evidently, the Prime Minister was not yet feeling too sure of her Party position in Parliament. With the loss of fifty-five members who went with the Syndicate, her precarious majority had been reduced to a minority. She had to depend upon the votes of some other Parties to sustain her legislative strength which is an arrangement not conducive to bold Budgetary adventures.

Yet, viewed objectively, though it may have disappointed some, but it was not a conventional budget. Its approach, or objective, outlined in the Prime Minister's opening words, was refreshingly different—an approach which was in keeping with her image as a forward-looking Finance Minister whose conscience was not mortgaged to Big Business. As *Link* news-magazine summed it up, "Neither flashy nor flamboyant, it was a concise statement of the modest purpose, to stimulate production and investment and, at the same time, make a beginning to solve the urgent problems of the needy and the poor." For once a Finance Minister disregarded the view of many of her predecessors that economic growth is retarded by schemes to provide social welfare. She emphasized the "vital link between the needs of growth and of distributive justice."

It was in the positive sphere of expenditure on social welfare schemes, however, that the new Finance Minister showed the boldness of her imagination and her compassionate concern for the common man. (Here, evidently, she was not inhibited by the antipathy of some of her Party colleagues who apparently prevented her from more effectively squeezing the monopolies and the corporate sector for mobilisation of taxes). Within the limitations of obviously restricted resources, she formulated several specific, imaginative and practical schemes to promote research on dry farming techniques, to undertake rural works programme in areas where famines were liable to recur, to set up an Urban Development Corporation to take up slum clearance and construction of housing colonies for the homeless and the indigent, to organise water supply in areas chronically prone to

drought conditions; to provide a minimum pension of Rs. 40 per month to retired Government employees; to create a special fund to give family pensions to industrial workers as well as a lump sum payment to their dependants in the event of death; to make up the deficiencies in the nutritional requirements of under-privileged children, specially in the tribal and slum areas. Even with the promise that she would like to extend these programmes provided more resources became available, all these schemes, worth-while as they were, hardly touched the fringe of the stupendous problem of poverty and deprivation.

In one of Thomas Hardy's novels, a child, one of a dozen, kills his brothers and sisters and then commits suicide, leaving behind a note scrawled in a childish hand-writing and childish spelling: "Bekos we wer too menny." Because we were too many! That was also the summing-up of the problem that confronted the housewife who had to provide a square meal to each of the millions of children of all ages left in her charge. Her larder was half-empty, the kitchen was not equipped to provide so many meals, while the hungry millions clamoured for food—as for the other necessities of life.

But it was characteristic of Indira Gandhi not to give in to despair. She was compassionate but not sentimental; she was a practical person and she had to do something, anything, to break the vicious cycle of inaction breeding lassitude and inertia. Undaunted by the enormity of the task, she made a beginning, however small. She knew that inaction bred not only inertia but pessimism and despair, bitterness and anger and violence. She went ahead to launch these schemes, however inadequate and small they might be, for she knew even little doses of social justice would generate a momentum that itself could become a positive force.

Finance Minister Indira Gandhi could not provide bread or a bowl of rice to all the people of India. But she did the next best thing. By the several schemes of social welfare initiated by her, she provided succour to some, and brought hope to the rest of them. She knew that, once this hope was kindled and sustained, the people would be enabled to help themselves. Some said she was being hypocritically or hopelessly idealistic. She replied that she was only being hopefully practical, as a



housewife has got to be who has to preside over the world's second largest kitchen !

Even before she presented the budget, Indira Gandhi had a foretaste of the problems she would have to face in her efforts at reorientation of the economic pattern of the country. These problems were not only personal, political and factional, but also legal and constitutional. Despite the united opposition of the 55 defectors from the Congress organisation and the Congress ideology (who still presumed to call themselves Congressmen) and their joining the ranks of Right Reaction, as represented by the Swataotra Party and the Jana Saogh, she had managed to get the Bank Nationalisation Bill passed by Parliament—mainly with the help and support of Leftist parties, the Socialists and the Communists (of both denominations) and the regional party of D.M.K. But her victory was short-lived, for the Supreme Court had invalidated the Banking Companies Act, on the ground that it saw "hostile discrimination" in the selection of only fourteen banks for nationalisation.

In the first ever clash of economic principles, the judiciary had chosen to uphold the *status quo* and the privileges of the few, against the people's interest. It had also, in effect, challenged the authority and sovereignty of Parliament to make laws in conformity with the needs of a dynamic, developing society. Historically, the situation was reminiscent of the experience of that great liberal, President Roosevelt, when he tried to cure the economic ills of the United States during the era of the Great Depression with economic measures that were collectively known as the New Deal. F.D.R. had met the challenge of an obstructionist Supreme Court by threatening to "pack" it with judges who were more in tune with the spirit of the times.

Indira Gandhi desisted from such a radical course, though it was open to her and had, indeed, been suggested by several people. She bowed to the authority of the Supreme Court, agreed to re-nationalise the Banks with the help of another ordinance, this time agreeing to pay Rs. 87 crores in three equal instalments to these fourteen banks as compensation. Incidentally, and significantly enough, the Supreme Court had been petitioned by the Swataotra Party general secretary, Dr.

Cooper, himself a banker. But Indira Gandhi bided her time, gracefully and tactfully, knowing that there was a higher court of appeal against the verdict of the Supreme Court—Parliament and, eventually, the people !

Both in India and abroad, cries were heard that Indira Gandhi, with the help of the Communists, was leading the country towards Marxist totalitarianism. It was also being suggested that a military take-over, as in Pakistan, was imminent in India. But, she told the correspondent of *U.S. World and News Report* that India was too big, and the Indian people were too politically experienced, to allow themselves to be ruled by a military dictatorship. She also disabused the American journalists' misgivings about India going Communist. "Our plans", she said, "do not call for socialising the entire economy ...(But) we do want the commanding heights of the economy to be in hands of the state—basic industries, defence industries, and, to a large extent, import trade." This, she concluded, was essential for India if the glaring economic disparities had to be removed, and an equitable distribution of the good things of life assured, by a process of constitutional reforms. The other alternative, she hinted, was violent revolution.

Soon a situation was to develop which dramatically illustrated the dangers inherent in a policy of delaying the reforms. Few states had taken land re-distribution as a necessary ingredient of land reforms to which not only the Congress Ministries, but all state Governments, even those headed by other parties, were committed. The Prime Minister had repeatedly warned her colleagues and Government officials that there was a limit to the patience of the people, and that they were becoming more and more restless every day. Now a revolutionary—but largely non-violent—"land grab" movement was set afoot by the Communist and Socialist parties canalising the anger and bitterness of millions of the landless poor who had been waiting for their *Do Bigha Zamin*.<sup>1</sup> The movement aimed at taking away the surplus land of the landlords and the big farmers,

1 *Two Bighas of Land*—The title of a moving film classic, directed by late Bimal Roy, about a landless peasant's struggle to acquire his own patch of land

including industrialist-farmers, and distributing it among the land-hungry poor. It was not the Naxalbari pattern of armed insurrection which owed its inspiration to the *Thoughts of Mao Tse-tung* and the guerilla primers written by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. But it had its revolutionary moments of mass upsurge, and certainly had all the signs and symbols of a mini rural revolution, but it was a typically—and even traditionally—Indian phenomenon. A correspondent of *Link*, the leftist weekly published from New Delhi, thus described what he saw in a rural area of West Bengal.

It is like a massive festival in rural areas. Thousands and thousands of people—landless, land-poor, middle peasants—come together. They carry red flags. Hundreds of red-capped volunteers carry indigenous arms: spears, lathis, bows and arrows. They are there to protect the peasants in the event of attack by *jotedars*<sup>1</sup> and their hirelings. There are leaders of the C.P.I., the Kisan Sabha, the Adivasi Mahasabha and the Agricultural Labourers' Union.

Conch shells are sounded by the womenfolk. A procession of pairs of bullocks follows; The yokes are decorated with red flags. Hundreds of ploughs. The movement begins. Wastelands and new surplus lands are occupied.

This happened in 1,200 places in West Bengal on a single day. Landless and land-poor peasants occupy lands which have been under illegal occupation by *jotedars*. They plough up acres of Government vested lands which are yet to be distributed.

At a certain place there are, say, 30 acres to be occupied. Four thousand people are assembled. They know only 30 persons will get land. The rest help their brothers in their mission. The land-poor and the landless do not have implements: no bullocks, no ploughs. Their middle peasant brothers come along. 'Take our things on a loan basis. Do your job, then return them.'

Unity among the land-poor, the landless and the middle peasants is total. This is unprecedented, even in West Bengal.

1. Landlords.

This was a major and unprecedented upheaval but essentially peaceful and non-violent, though the landless poor would carry their ineffectual and seldom used arms like bows and arrows to symbolize their determination to resist any attacks by the land-owners. But, unfortunately, no sizable section of Congressmen was associated with this inspiring and mainly peaceful, movement which was an urgent reminder to the State administration to heed the repeated warnings uttered by Indira Gandhi. The Congress had still to shed its middle-class and pro-landlord bias.

The movement, on a less widespread and more symbolic scale, was carried on in other states, too. In Maharashtra the grape vineyards, orchards and farms belonging to the Chief Minister and other Central and State Ministers were *gheraoed* and symbolically trespassed. The Socialist Party volunteers made a big show of "occupying" a small farm of only four acres, which got a big play in the Press, because it belonged to a person called Indira Gandhi. An imaginative person like her should have known that it was a symbolic reminder not to her personally but to the Prime Minister that the land reforms (as she had herself admitted) had been unconscionably and deliberately delayed by the vested interests in the State government's.

Was it because of this subjective factor that the Prime Minister, while speaking in the Rajya Sabha, condemned the land movement as unconstitutional and entirely un-Gandhian. She saw the "acquisitive" spirit behind the movement *which* she said, was based on "envy and greed". Probably *she had* reason to regret her expression when it was *echoed with* approbation by the Jana Sangh leader Atal Bihari *Vajpayee* in Parliament a few days later when he blew his top, *expressing* alarm at the spirit of "greed" which had been unleashed *in the* movement.

Strangely or, perhaps, not so strangely enough *even* Indira Gandhi's Congress colleagues could be *seen* applauding the virulent attacks of the Cong *Q* by Subhag Singh, Swatantra Party's N.G. Ranga *and* Vajpayee on the land occupation movement. *Some of the* speakers—including Congressmen piously professed *that*—spoke of the horrible possibilities of house *being*

grabbing and even wife-grabbing following in the wake of the land occupation movement which some sensation-seeking reporter had described as "land-grab", conjuring the spectre of the Stalinist collectivisation of Soviet agriculture.

One could explain this unity of the irreconcilables in terms of class interest, but how would one explain the bizarre fact that the great revolutionaries of the Marxist Communist Party also joined the chorus of condemnation. Strangely enough, they said that "its aim was to create an illusion among the peasants that Indira Gandhi and her Congress were really interested in land reforms." It was left to a C.P.I. member to say that the movement highlighted the failure to implement land reforms, and exposing the big business tycoons (like the Birlas) who alone had 80,000 acres of land in their possession, despite ceiling regulations. Nobody, he complained, talked of the "greed" and the "acquisitive spirit" of the Birlas! That "the movement had awakened the country" and dramatised the need to implement land reforms speedily was demonstrated in Parliament itself when members gave a rough time to the Food Minister Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and demanded that a deadline be fixed for the country-wide implementation of land reforms.

Indira Gandhi did not admit it but this debate must have brought home the desperate and even dangerous urgency of implementing, and completing the process of land reforms. The people are impatient, she had once said. Now she knew that, indeed, they were!

On the eve of Independence Day, 1970, Indira Gandhi told an interviewer, "Our objective can be defined simply: to achieve a socialist society.... There must be a steady narrowing of inequalities and enlargement of income-earning opportunities for the weaker sections of society." In another message, she said that "we have to enlarge the area of Socialism."

Soon her Government was making a bid to remove one of the glaring anomalies in such a Socialist society. The presence of feudal Princes, with their privileges and privy purses in a democratic set-up which was pledged to take the Socialist path of building up an egalitarian society, was one of those historical

contradictions that were the legacy of our "non-violent revolution by compromise."

Some of these privileges—gun-salutes and titles—were ornamental and illusionary, but some others—like the privy purses—were quite substantial. For a poor country like India it was truly scandalous that about a hundred crores of tax-free money (equal to a thousand crores if tax deductions had been made) were paid to a few hundred parasitical puppets during the 20 years since the independence of India. The Nizams of Hyderabad had received about 8 crores during this period.

But, more than the actual amounts paid to them, it was the very idea of some people enjoying a life of luxury out of their fabulous unearned, un-taxed "purses" that was abhorrent and repellent. These princes or their ancestors, under the protective umbrella of British imperialism, had not only been profligates but puny little tyrants against whom the States People's Conference, an adjunct of the Congress, had carried on a prolonged struggle for democratic rights.

When the Prime Minister decided to abolish the privileges and privy purses of the Princes, there was again a hue and cry, led by Jana Sangh's Vajpayee, that she was acting under Communist pressure. But it was a ploy that no one now took seriously. Shortly before the Constitution (Twenty-fourth Amendment) Bill was put to vote in the Lok Sabha, Indira Gandhi appealed to members to act "in accordance with the spirit of the times." She admitted that while the abolition of privy purses and princely privileges might not solve poverty, unemployment or other problems, "but it is a step in the particular direction in which the country wants to go and will go in spite of any body. If we do not take it, we will be swept aside."

She referred to the multi-party support that the Bill had got. "Honourable Members know that it is not our party alone which is anxious to bring these measures," and pointedly added, "Many parties support it, and these are all not Communist."

This speech of hers, one of the most memorable, reveals her to be not only a political strategist but also a compassionate social philosopher with an original mind. "It is strange

to hear it said that this is a step to destroy them (the princes)," she twitted the Opposition argument, and added, "but it can be a step that strengthens them because they can now make their life on their own feet, and not on the basis of what their forefathers were. It is in their hands to decide what type of future they want to build for themselves."

The Bill got the required two-third majority—in the face of very vocal and determined opposition—a tribute to Indira Gandhi's parliamentary acumen. Incidentally, she created a situation where the Congress-O had to vote against the Bill, along with the Swatantra and the Jana Sangh, thus dramatically and conclusively exposing them as conservatives and reactionaries, a charge they had all along been refuting. But the Bill had to be ratified by the Upper House and when it went to Rajya Sabha it was marginally but critically lost by one solitary vote less than the required two-third majority—highlighting the precarious and perilous position of Indira Gandhi's party and government in Parliament.

On her advice, President Giri issued an order withdrawing recognition of the special privileges given to the Princes in the Constitution and ordering the stoppage of Privy Purses. Once again the Supreme Court came to their rescue, and upheld a petition of some princes, holding the Presidential order as legally invalid.

Like Roosevelt, Indira Gandhi could immediately "pack" the Supreme Court with judges which would give a favourable verdict on the Constitutional verdict. But it would expose her to the charge of using back-door methods to carry through social legislation. She was sure that the composition of Parliament did not reflect the real political situation in the country. The enthusiasm generated by the Banks nationalisation and the abolition of Privy Purses indicated a significant shift in her favour since the last elections. The people had begun to feel that she meant business when she spoke of socialism and the removal of inequalities and inequities. She would not resort to any constitutional stratagem to carry through her programme. She would go to the people.

That very evening she advised the President to dissolve the Lok Sabha and to order elections to enable her to seek a fresh

## 5

### Rendezvous With The People !

*We are all agents of the same supreme power, the people.*

—DANIEL WEBSTER

*Such message as I had was meant for them all, whether they were voters or not; for every Indian, for every Indian man, woman, and child. The excitement of this adventure held me, this physical and emotional communion with vast numbers of people.*

—JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

**T**HE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA WAS IN TEARS.

The occasion was solemn, even sad, yet memorable and heart-lifting. Indira Gandhi was formally handing over Anand Bhawan—the last piece of her ancestral property—and dedicating it to the nation.

Her grandfather had built two magnificent houses in the architectural wilderness of Allahabad. Swaraj Bhawan—which once housed the Central offices of the Congress party—was already converted by her father into the Kamala Nehru Memorial Hospital. Now the other one, Anand Bhawan—the House of Bliss—would belong to Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Trust.



husband, too, was no more.

And, seated on her eminent but lonely pinnacle, she was once again only a child and an orphan; she was once again only a woman and a widow !

She had invited several hundred relations, friends and neighbours to be with her on this occasion. Among them was P.D. Tandon, veteran journalist and life-long Nehru-watcher, and this is how he recollects the occasion !

...one could see that she was struggling to continue her speech but could not. There was a lump in her throat. Memories of Anand Bhawan were pursuing her. She wept, and tears rolled down her cheeks. She wiped them again and again. Those who saw her sobbing felt sad, and those who are near to her nearly cried ....

She recalled the stirring events which she, and Anand Bhawan, had witnessed during the years of the national struggle—the bonfires of foreign cloth, the arrests, the lathi charges, when the injured would be accommodated in the rooms and verandahs of Anand Bhawan, and doctors could attend to them only in the dark hours of the night. This house, she said “was not merely a structure of brick and mortar, but a symbol of India’s struggle for freedom.” Great decisions were taken in that house. Now it would be used to spread the ideas and ideals which were dear to the heart of Jawaharlal Nehru. Tandon concludes her impressions of the evening on a sad yet inspiring note :

The function came to a close and the guests returned to their homes. But now Indira Gandhi had no home of her own. Anand Bhawan had been given away to the nation.

Making her first election speech at a mass meeting, held in the open square where her father and her grandfather once used to address stirring meetings during the freedom struggle, she set the pattern for the whirlwind campaign that would carry her to most cities, and many towns and villages, in every state of India, from the frozen peaks of the Himalayas in Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh to the sweltering palm groves

of Kerala, not far from the equator, criss-crossing the country several times over.

She addressed big meetings and small, from the Indian equivalent of the whistle-stop stations—wherever a few hundred villagers waited for her during a car journey—to big mass meetings of a million or more which she addressed in the metropolitan cities of New Delhi, Bombay, or Calcutta. But the message that she transmitted to illiterate peasants or sophisticated city-dwellers, whether magnified through microphones and loud-speakers, or spokeo through a battery-operated loud-hailer, held in her hand, or shouted aloud without any mechanical aid, while she stood up, using her open jeep as a pulpit to talk to a road-side 'congregation' of villagers, was always the same. The inaugural speech in Allahabad, indeed, was her key-note address in which she said that she had accepted the challenge of the critics and detractors of her and her policies who had been demanding her resignation. Through the dissolution of the Lok Sabha (the House of the People) she wanted to prove that her policies and programmes represented the desires and aspirations of her people.

Talking about the Naxalite activities, especially in West Bengal, she said something that Congress rulers were otherwise reluctant to admit, that the movement had started primarily to restore the poor peasants' lands in Naxalbari but later it had taken a different, and unfortunately violent turn, which she regretted.

Referring to her government's decision to end the anachronism of the Princes, their privileges and privy purses, now it was for the people to endorse or reject that decision.

The Prime Minister said that, soon after the split in the Congress, the political atmosphere in the country had become so vitiated that they could not go ahead with their socialist policies and programmes. Some of their own colleagues had parted with them on issues like banks-nationalisation and the privy purses.

Though there had been a lot of progress and development in the country, she said, its benefits had not reached the lower strata of the people. Instead, the gap between the rich and the poor had widened. With this in view, the Government would

I carried about microphones and loud speakers and addressed a dozen meetings a day, apart from impromptu gatherings by the roadside. Some mammoth meetings approached a hundred thousand, and sometimes it was much greater. On a rough estimate it can be said that ten million persons actually attended the meetings I addressed, and probably several million more were brought into some kind of touch with me during my journeying by road.

I rushed about from place to place from the northern frontiers of India to the southern seas, taking little rest, kept up by the excitement of the moment and the enormous enthusiasm that met me. It was an extraordinary feat of physical endurance which surprised me. This election campaign stirred up the whole countryside and a new life was visible everywhere. It was much more than an election campaign. For me it was a voyage of discovery of India and her people....

Nehru has described elsewhere how at the end of a crowded and exhausting day of travelling across the hot and dry countryside when his voice would be hoarse from having to speak—even to shout—incessantly, he would arrive in some remote village where the villagers had been patiently waiting some hours for him to appear. He would shed his vest like a loose outer garment, and feel refreshed and revived by looking at those eager faces with their eyes full of hope.

Thirty-five years later, in 1971 his daughter (older than her father was in that election campaign of 1936) was a match for that feat of endurance. According to an analysis by Indira Gandhi travelled 30,000 miles by jet plane and helicopters, 3,000 miles by car, jeep and train. She attended nearly 400 meetings and the total attendance at all the meetings was about twenty million—more than the entire population of Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. On an average day, she addressed about a dozen meetings and she kept a normal working day of eighteen hours, and three or four hours a day. There is a significant end of one such chart which states that...

Gandhi's meetings cancelled because of indisposition and fatigue was exactly Zero !

What makes Sammy run ? What gave Nehru—and more surprisingly still, his daughter—this prodigious physical, mental and moral stamina ? Is it ambition, the sense of power they were able to exercise over the people ? Or is it a quality of leadership, that strange communion between the leader and the people ? Is it a sense of duty, like the endurance of a soldier under artillery fire in the trenches ? Is it idealism that sustains them, inspires them, chemically transforms their body tissues to withstand the mounting strain, and keeps their blood-pressure, and their heart-beats, steady ? Or is it the rejuvenating effect of the knowledge that whatever the difficulties and hardships, one is voluntarily enduring them in a worth-while cause—freedom of the country, the enlightenment and the democratic mobilization of the masses, or the more urgent necessity to inform and organize the people to assert their democratic rights to achieve economic emancipation which hitherto had been denied to them ?

There is no tonic as powerful and health-giving as the consciousness of having discharged an onerous and historic responsibility in which one is whole-heartedly, even passionately, involved. Consider the remarkable phenomenon of Churchill during the critical days of the war, surviving or, rather, taking in his lusty stride a serious heart-attack of which his physician, Lord Morain, did not even inform him. The war was too big a responsibility for Churchill to listen to a murmur of his heart. This election, this bloodless campaign, was Indira Gandhi's non-violent war upon her enemies whom she regarded—and rightly so—as the enemies of her people !

Dr. Gisela Bonn, German TV writer, journalist and author who has known the Prime Minister for many years, spent several days with her, riding in the same plane, during the whirl-wind election campaign, and she describes the military precision with which Indira Gandhi conducted this 'war' from her flying headquarters. The Prime Minister used the time in the plane to look through important official files and reports from her ambassadors around the globe, dictating replies to her

secretaries, granting interviews to journalists and TV people, and snatching a few moments to mentally prepare herself for the next audience and her next speech.

Again and again the plane had touched down at some small airfield where we had boarded land-rovers, passenger cars and jeeps, driving from village to village in a column raising clouds of dust....

Isn't it rather too much for a woman? I asked her, when she managed to find time for a private talk between stops on our tearing flight comprising thousands of miles. "It certainly isn't easy", she smiled. "But why stress the woman part? Do you think it would be easier for a man?"

The German author recalls the flying visit to Kharagpur in Bengal in February, at a time when militantly hostile Marxist Communists were firmly entrenched in that state and that town. Indira Gandhi was literally carrying the war right into the enemy camp :

We landed in the dusk at a small military airfield some 14 miles outside the town. Kharagpur, an industrial centre, had been described to us as a bastion of left-wing communism. Indeed, the signs were unmistakable. Hammer and sickles painted in blinding crimson on the walls of houses and on the asphalt road. I half-expected a welcome of communist slogans and stones, but the very contrary happened ; the drive from the airfield to town was turned into a triumphal tour.... Beneath hammer and sickle, the Bengalis...were hailing their democratic Prime Minister....

Not a voice rose against her in the great square, as she addressed the crowds from a four-foot dais, speaking of her policy of socialism and secularism.... When she attacked the extreme right, Jana Sangh, the masses went wild with delight. That moment was the turning point.... Her attack on the Right had simultaneously ensured her decisive, if not absolute, success over the extreme Left.

There were other memorable incidents including the forced

miraculous or magical powers. What she said was that, the progressive policies lately initiated by her Party had some effect in, at least, making a dent on these problems.

With the democratic help of the common people, she promised to pursue the same policies with greater vigour. Then, together, the Government and the people could hope to begin to solve the problems of poverty and unemployment.

In these strongholds of feudalism, she was quite candid about the confrontation of the forces which were ranged against the radical and forward-looking policies of the Congress—the princes, the communalists, the powerful vested interests. She holdly denounced the reactionary role of the Rajas and Maharajas of Rajasthan, and her very plain-speaking won her tremendous applause. The Indian people have always admired courage, and courage, they now knew, their Prime Minister had in plenty! The same courage of her convictions she displayed in openly attacking the regional chauvinism of the Shiv Sena which had unsuccessfully tried to disrupt her meetings in Bombay.

The two points she made at her meetings were applauded everywhere—in Kotab or Jodhpur, Rajkot or Ahmedabad or Bombay. The first was her appeal to the people to evaluate the ideas and ideals, regardless of personalities. "I can be silenced or even killed," she said, "but my ideas and the ideals that I uphold cannot be suppressed or destroyed." (Strange that she should have been charged with inspiring a cult of personality!)

The second was her warning that if the desirable and imperative changes in the social order could not be brought about by peaceful and democratic means, these changes would still come somehow, perhaps by non-peaceful and totalitarian means, and those who stood in the way of change would be simply swept away.

Meanwhile, the Congress Election Manifesto was published concretising Indira Gandhi's basic policies and plans in a 12-point Programme of Progress. The people were asked to vote for the Congress candidates, giving a clear mandate to them, among other things to—

continue the advance to Socialism through democratic process and to speed up implementations ;  
 defend secularism and safeguard the interests of minorities ;  
 end anachronistic privileges such as privy purses, etc. and reduce glaring disparities of income and opportunity ;  
 accelerate a dynamic programme of agricultural development...which will improve the condition of small farmers, in dry areas, the landless, artisans and others ;  
 enlarge the scope of the public sector and improve its performance ;  
 provide fresh avenues of employment and to secure the participation of our citizens in economic development ;  
 crush the concentration of economic power and wealth ;  
 to control prices ;  
 and to launch schemes of child welfare, specially to provide nutritious diet to pre-school children.

The sting, however, was in its tail. The twelfth clause was most important because the people were specifically asked to give a mandate "for these purposes, to effect such amendments of the Constitution as may be necessary." This was the principal reason why Indira Gandhi had decided to gamble her whole political career in this mid-term poll, which would either give her a big enough majority to carry out her plans of the social and economic transformation, or (if the people so desired) to sweep her and her government out of power !

Every one of the hundreds of long and short speeches she delivered in those days was a paraphrase, and elucidation, of these 12 points of the Manifesto, specially of her desire to constitutionally change the Constitution, where its provisions stood in the way of ensuring the welfare of the common people. But there was one speech which deserves to be singled out, as the most important of them all. She delivered it to, perhaps, a million citizens of Old and New Delhi, gathered in the Ramlila grounds, symbolically situated between the old and the new cities.

This speech was important not only for masterly elucidation

tion of her, and her Party's, policies and also for the many personal, even emotional asides, the local touches and topical allusions, the lightning flashes of wit and humour and sarcasm enlivening the two-hour long discourse. This speech was, moreover, indicative of the stature she had achieved, the self-confidence she had acquired, and the personality she had developed since coming to power, the communion she was able to establish with her people.

This was a new kind of eloquence which did away with rhetorical flourishes; behind its deceptively disarming simplicity was profundity of thought and compassionate feeling. It was not a speech, not an oration, not a lecture, it was more of a talk among friends—she rarely raised her voice in anger—but the one who was talking knew what she was talking about. She knew also how to answer her critics without rancour and without malice, and yet to deliver the perfect retort.

The speech, of course, was in Hindi and, though a very competent English rendering<sup>1</sup> was published in *Socialist India*, the official weekly of the All-India Congress Committee, the translation can do but scant justice to the fluency of the original.

She could not have chosen a better opening, seeking a poetic parallel in nature and in hoary legend for the political situation and the imperatives of change. Speaking on January 31, she said "Let me at the outset give greetings for Spring. Today is *Basant Panchami*, a day of rejoicing, when Nature is reborn and the earth acquires a new face...Spring not only clothes the world in beauty but teaches how the world renews itself from time to time. The message of Spring is that this world and other worlds in the universe are sustained only because they keep changing. None can live by sticking to a groove." Her audience got the message, and applauded. They knew the stick-in-the-mud conservatives who were opposed to Indira Gandhi and to the winds of change.

In passing, she struck a personal note, for she knew that the sentimental Indian people responded well to this kind of reminiscence. "For me this is a special day", she confided to

1. Translated by Smt. Sarala Jag Mohan (Authorised version).



them, "for on this very day, in old Delhi, my parents were married 55 years ago."

Having established a personal rapport with her audience, she launched into the political background of the election, but prefaced it with a philosophic observation, reminiscent of her father's concern with fundamental and universal truths. "We have reached a stage when not only we in India, but youth and thinking people all over the world, have to consider seriously what type of society they would like to have. What type of future do we want for the world? In which direction do we want to go?"

Then she talked about "the way of science and technology", that at last it is possible for mankind to abolish poverty and hunger. But there are vested interests opposed to the way of change. "They think of strife and conflict and disagreement." And these forces, too, were known to her audience!

She recalled the freedom struggle, which was also a struggle for democracy and social justice, and linked it with the world-wide struggle for the same values. As a part of this struggle, Jawaharlal Nehru drew up a programme for industrial growth and planned development, and his daughter reminded her audience that even then *they* opposed not only his plans but the very concept of planning itself. The same people ridiculed him when, after independence, he started big industries in the public sector to make India self-reliant. She asserted, "If we had followed their path nothing would have been achieved," and certainly the remarkable economic regeneration and transformation of India would not have been possible.

Who were these people? She identified them. "While the country was fighting for its freedom they openly collaborated with the British, with the capitalists and the princes."

"Today," she added, "these very people are saying that our Socialism is a fraud. Do they even know the meaning of Socialism?" She asked and the audience heartily laughed at the expense of the pseudo-Socialists and the anti-Socialists.

Stung by her opponents' attacks upon her and her family, she struck a sombre and subjective note that she normally avoids in her public utterances. "The story of my family is an open book to you, to the country and to the world. I do not

like to talk about myself. But I am forced to do so because some people have said that my family has tried to amass property for ourselves. We, who have given away everything we had, are now called upon to prove ourselves. I have merely a few acres of land in Delhi, but how much do these people possess? Those who have millions speak as though we are hiding our possessions."

Her family, she said, had joined the Congress when the only privilege was to face bullets. I have faced bullets and so had my mother. My grandfather had braved lathi blows. Even my grandmother was hit on the head." Seldom, if ever, she has talked about her family with such obvious pride. It only showed how she had taken the libellous attacks upon her integrity to heart.

In Delhi the Jana Sangh represented the main opposition to the Congress, and she let them have it. "Today I would like to ask the Sangh leaders how many of them can stand up and claim to have faced such tyranny? I would like to ask them how many of them had ever raised a slogan for freedom, not to speak of facing the dangers? How many of them had raised the banner of freedom in their streets and their homes?"

Recalling the martyrdom of Gandhiji, she exhorted her audience to remove all vestiges of communalism and fanaticism and intolerance from their hearts. Only then, she said, we could build a secular society in which there would be no discrimination between one person and another.

Referring to the opposition's charge that Indira Gandhi was destroying democracy, she said, "Indira Gandhi is giving them the chance to democratically get elected if they can get votes of the people. Does it mean the end of Democracy?" Then she turned to the pressmen who were present in large numbers. "You know who is writing in favour of Indira Gandhi and who is writing against her. Do we prevent you from coming here, from writing what you like? Dictatorship begins with gagging of the opposition papers. I would like to know if any newspapers have been gagged." Once again the point went home, for the people had been appalled and provoked by the calumnious attacks upon her in many of the papers, the biggest of whom were opposed to her.

Her most telling phrases for the Grand Alliance of capita-

lists, communalists and the Old Congress, whose "main programme was only one: *Indira Hatao*. They have themselves emphasised that is their chief aim. I have repeatedly stated that whether Indira remains Prime Minister or not, it is not at all an important thing. I am not very much interested in being in power, nor should you be. We should be interested only in what changes we desire to introduce in our Society, and whether we want to bring about changes or not."

Pointing out the glaring disparities, she talked about the Maharajas and their extraordinary privileges, and explained the paradox in homely terms which every one in the audience could understand. "They do not pay taxes on water and electricity or pay any medical charges. Think for yourselves, if this is fair. What are your husbands, brothers, fathers or sons earning? They have to pay all these taxes. And these people have millions, can they not pay such small taxes?" She blamed the Jana Sangh and the Syndicate for trying to block the Bill for the abolition of Privy Purses. She talked about the "forty families" who had monopolised most of the nation's wealth. "We do not say that we shall take away their wealth. We merely say that in future they shall not make so much profit." She talked about economic changes and social changes that had become overdue. "For centuries a great number of evils have crept into our society."

She appealed to women to realise the issues at stake, and not to be misled by the slogans about religion, culture and language which are all meant to keep the masses in a perpetual state of backwardness. "When our women see this point, they will be able to come out of that backwardness."

She reminded the youth of their responsibility to build a dynamic, new India on the basis of socialism and secularism. The young men and women—and they formed the bulk of her audience—lustily applauded when she said, "I want the youth of today to do such great deeds that in future centuries, the students of history, when they read about this age, will marvel at the young men and women of today who gave a new turn to society and made our India strong and united and great."

Turning to the Jana Sangh opposition she said that in one of their meetings, "I was described not only as a Hitler but as

a combination of Hitler, Mussolini and a couple of other dictators." There was a tremendous burst of laughter. She waited for silence, then added the punch-line "You laugh, but those people did not say it as a joke. They were very serious." She went on to say that the true heirs of Hitler who butchered millions of innocent Jews were those in India "who shout, burn, and kill, or attack the minorities."

Towards the end she struck the hopeful note. Addressing the people of Delhi, she said, "We have to show that this city of Delhi which has seen many ups and downs and has been a witness of history—and also a part of it—can make a new history. Let history show that we were able to carry the fruits of independence to enrich the life of the people, to their homes and huts."

Throughout her inordinately long speech, she never once canvassed for any of the local candidates, never mentioned any names, it was as if she was unconcerned as to whom the people give their votes. It was not an electioneering speech, there was no demagogy, no personal attacks on any individuals. Like her father's speeches—but delivered more fluently and effectively, with greater restraint, and without Jawaharlal's intellectual sweep and flashes of temper—it seemed to be aimed more at the ideological education of the people rather than at vote-getting. And yet, more than any other single factor, it turned the tables in that stronghold of Jana Sangh, and since that day the tide turned in favour of the Congress in all the Delhi constituencies.

Six weeks before the election came what was alliteratively termed as the "Message from Maniram". It was the most significant development, a real shot in the arm for the Indira Congress, and a hopeful preview of coming events. In a bye-election to the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly, Ram Kishan Dwivedi, an obscure young journalist, with no resources and no organisation, his only asset being that he was a nominee of Indira Gandhi's party, confronted Tribhuvan Narain Singh, the rich and powerful Chief Minister of the U.P. Coalition Government composed of the Syndicate Congress, the Bharatiya Kranti Dal, the Jana Sangh, the Samyukt Socialist Party and the Swatantra.

The stalwarts of all these parties—e.g., former Chief Ministers C.B. Gupta and Charan Singh, Bihar Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur, Jana Sangh's Atal Bihari Vajpayee, S.S.P.'s Raj Narain—came and canvassed support for the State Chief Minister. Additional support came from the all-powerful Mahant Avaidyanath of Guru Gorakhnath Temple.

It looked like the poor journalist was confronted by a formidable and invincible opposition. But when the ballot papers were counted, incredibly enough, he had won by a substantial margin—32,230 votes against the Chief Minister's 17,137. What was, perhaps, one of the decisive factors in the campaign was the support that Dwivedi received from the District Committee of the Communist Party of India whose workers went from village to village urging the people to defy the Mahant who was trying to invoke the authority of religion, and to vote for the candidate who stood for Indira Gandhi's forward-looking policies.

By the time she herself came to tour the constituency, sufficient enthusiasm had been generated, the issues already explained and clarified by younger leaders like Chandrajit Yadav. No wonder that people turned up in tens of thousands to listen to her. Disregarding the advice of Security officers who, fearing threatened counter demonstrations by Syndicate supporters, wanted her to use a covered car, she went about in an open jeep, receiving cheers and acclamations of the people, and exhorting them to set an example to the rest of the country. The people of Maniram did not fail her. Would the people of India be any different?

In her country-wide campaign tour, Indira Gandhi did not forget her own constituency of Rai Bareilly, in Uttar Pradesh. She took advantage of the visit she had to make to file her nomination papers to address as many as fifteen big and small meetings in Rai Bareilly town and in the villages that comprised the constituency which had been her father's before her. She was well-known in this area, for Jawaharlal often left the daughter in charge of his voters.

It was a touching tribute to her that the poor people collected Rs. 30,000 and odd as their contribution to the Congress

election fund. Out of this amount Rs. 75 came from the rickshaw-pullers, Rs. 50 from the vegetable growers and sellers, Rs. 425 from the lawyers in the District Courts, Rs. 500 from all the residents of a small village, Rs. 1000 from a bigger village.

On this visit she was also able to see the people enjoying the fruits of bank-nationalisation. On the dusty *katcha* roads of the district a new means of transport had appeared which was called the jeep-taxi, which was fast taking the place of the bullock-carts in this backward area with hardly any roads linking the villages.

There were about fifty such vehicles (locally called *phut-phuts* like the scooter tongas of Delhi) in the district which were operated by enterprising educated and semi-educated young men, who solved their unemployment problem—and the transport problem of their almost inaccessible villages—by obtaining these taxis on loans secured from nationalised banks. Now they showed their gratitude by refusing to hire their taxis to a rich man who was working on behalf of the Prime Minister's rival candidate. Instead, they all *phut-phuted* to the local Congress office and offered their services free for a month to work on "our Indiraji's" behalf. It was a heart-warming experience for her to meet these large-hearted young men who, and whose vehicles, proved the diverse ways in which the nationalised banks were working for the common people.

It was not necessary for her to stay in her constituency, the local people encouraged her to leave it to them, and to concentrate her attention on other—and difficult—parts of the country where her presence was more urgently needed. The election was being fought on new lines, and required elasticity of approach and a wider understanding with several parties—including Communist Party of India—and individual progressives, to ensure the defeat of the like-minded conservative and communalist parties. India had already reaped the harvest of the new approach in Kerala. Overcoming and reversing her earlier anti-Communist bias when she, as Congress President, had recommended the dismissal of the Communist-led Kerala Ministry, she had sanctioned a close cooperation between the Congress and the C.P.I.-led United Front, which had ensured the victory of the

progressives in the Mid-term Assembly elections. That was six months ago, in September 1970, but since then a Congress-Communist coalition Ministry was successfully functioning in Kerala which, at last, had a stable administration.

The lesson of Kerala was not lost on Indira Gandhi. Despite the efforts of the more die-hards in the organisation, who did their best to scuttle whatever understandings Congress had been able to reach with the Communist, Socialist and other Left parties, Indira Gandhi adroitly and shrewdly encouraged an informal and un-official Left United Front to emerge which was led by the Congress, which was prepared to make local adjustments with other Leftists and progressives to the mutual advantage of both, and to the discomfiture of the Rightist reactionaries.

The Prime Minister was actually fighting a battle on two fronts. On the one hand, she was confronted with the Grand Alliance of all Rightist parties including those who, till yesterday, were her colleagues and Party-men.

However, within her own party, too, there were those who, while paying lip-service to her progressive ideology, did not really favour her radical policies and programmes, or at least had reservations about them. Indira Gandhi managed to eliminate quite a number of them, when she dropped about a hundred names from the old Lok Sabha. She brought in the new, younger, and more radical elements—by and large, quite a new type of candidates for the Congress to support and sponsor.

But, as later events would confirm, she could not always resist factional pressures and could not eliminate all the undesirables from the organisation which, despite the defection of the more obvious conservatives and reactionaries, continued to shelter several whose minds were pledged to the Syndicate, though they dared not openly oppose the basic policies of Indira Gandhi. They would use subterranean methods to subvert and sabotage from within the citadel of power, or use the trust and tolerance of their leader to pursue their own selfish personal ends.

Indira Gandhi was the most effective, but not the only effective,

factor in the elections. There were also other hopeful factors. Since the Great Divide that purged the Congress of at least some of the more conspicuously reactionary elements, there had been an exodus of progressive intellectuals and Left-oriented youth to join the organisation. Some she had encouraged to join. Others, finding the new atmosphere in the Congress more congenial, had joined on their own. In Bombay, for instance, a year earlier several hundred intellectuals and prominent leaders in different fields—barristers, lawyers, doctors, professors, journalists, all progressives and several former Communists or what are known as “fellow-travellers”—had announced their decision, in the presence of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, to join the New Congress.

The “committed” intellectuals had once been an integral part of the Congress leadership. But, after the death of Gandhiji, the Congress movement lost one intellectual after another. They were either snatched away by Death, or by other, and more dynamic, parties; it was one of the misfortunes of Jawaharlal Nehru that he could not replenish the dwindling stock of intellectuals in the Congress. With the eclipse of the “Brains”, the commanding positions in the organisation were monopolised by professional “Bosses”—the political manipulators, the vote-getters, the money-collectors. It was the domination of the Congress, specially in the provincial committees, by such types that led to its downfall.

The intellectuals were disillusioned in the Old Congress which had ceased to be an instrument of change, even as many of the intellectuals in the Communist Party were driven out, or away, by the sectarianism and left adventurism of B.T. Ranadive. In their sulky retirement, the intellectuals were busy with professional advancement. But they were not happy, for Man (specially an intellectual, sensitive, conscious and “committed” Man) does not live by bread, or money, or success, alone. Now many of them had come out of their retirement to join the ranks of the rejuvenated and revitalised Congress under the banner of Indira Gandhi.

The same reasons brought many active, dynamic young men and women, students and non-students, to join the Congress. Both of them—the intellectuals and youth—who had been



attracted to the new dynamism of Indira Congress, played a decisive role in re-organising and revitalising the organisation on the eve of, and during, the elections. In many places where the local leadership had either defected to the Syndicate or had become inactive and ineffective, the youth, the students and the intellectuals stepped into the breach. In Bombay City, for instance, I saw how Rajni Patel, one of the intellectuals who had joined the Congress a year earlier and who, on the eve of the elections, was appointed by Indira Gandhi to be the President of the B.P.C.C., vindicated her trust by successfully organising the dynamic campaign. Reminiscent of Krishna Menon's North Bombay electoral victory against the Rightist-backed Acharya Kripalani in 1962, he and his Leftist colleagues had indefatigably worked to secure the unexpectedly spectacular victory of Congress in Bombay.

The coming into the Congress of these progressive and dynamic elements was crucial and fortuitous, because since the last elections millions of new youthful voters had been enrolled, thus introducing a decisive factor in the Mid-term Poll. Between 30 to 40 million young men and young women were getting a chance to vote for the first time. This was the angry new generation; some of them, out of frustration and misdirection, had become Naxalite extremists. Some of them, from more fanatical families, were won over by the chauvinist slogans of Jana Sangh or the regional parties like D.M.K. But the majority of them were attracted by the dynamic slogans of Socialism and Secularism—the platform of Indira Gandhi. For youth, by nature and temperament, is restless, iconoclastic, dynamic and even destructive. By voting for Indira Gandhi, they were not only voting for the more progressive ideology but had the additional satisfaction of helping to destroy the old-style leadership of the Congress, and defeating the parties of reaction and the vested interests.

As a shrewd political strategist, as well as because she believed in youth and in youthful dynamism, Indira Gandhi took the maximum advantage of this new element—and not only in the subservient role of volunteers, agitators and organisers. She had already seen to it that the re-organised Congress Committees should have a proper representation of youthful elements.

Now she insisted on all the states to choose a fair number of youthful candidates, for it was part of her programme to shift emphasis from age to youth. It was possible to enlist these new and young candidates for she had discarded at least a hundred names of those who were members of the old Lok Sabha.

This "infiltration" of youth was best illustrated in West Bengal where in 25 per cent constituencies the Congress fielded candidates of the 25-35 age group, the youngest of them—Subrata Mukherji—being only 26 years old. Many of the youthful candidates were leaders of the student organisation, the *Chhatra Parishad*, including Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, President of the Youth Congress, a phenomenal live-wire, who won his Parliamentary seat against the formidable Marxist Communist candidate, Ganesh Ghosh. These *Chhatra Parishad* elements in the Congress were able to match their strength in the elections against the C.P.M., and otherwise against Naxalites, because they, too, were dynamic and inspired by a dynamic progressive ideology, and could not be accused of being agents of reactionary vested interests.

The last day of the election battle found the Prime Minister exhausted but optimistic, though gloomy prophets were forecasting a defeat for her at the polls. According to "reliable" correspondents and "experts", she would not have even as many seats as in the old Lok Sabha, so that (according to them) she would have to form a Coalition government with the help of the Communists. And that, of course, would be the end of her—and the end of the world!

The free day between the end of polling and the announcement of the results was a day of suspense—even for her. During the last seven years, that was the only one day when she gave herself a complete holiday. No files, no interviews, no conferences, no nothing! She played with her grandson Rahul in the garden of her house, and in the afternoon arranged to see a movie in the auditorium of Rashtrapati Bhawan. The title of the film, symbolically enough, was *Anand* (Happiness).

When the 150 million votes cast in about 520 Parliamentary constituencies had been duly counted—the biggest democratic operation in history—it was an overwhelming victory for Indira Gandhi and her new policies. The election results were

variously described as a "landslide", "a cup of astonishment", "the Great Renewal", "Indira Wave" and a "massive mandate".

"It is a massive mandate for radical reforms, for *gharibi hatao*," said the Leftist *Link* newsmagazine of Delhi, "It is a mandate against the forces of reaction and the Right parties, whose adventurist allies in the ranks of the Left have been shown their place.... It will now be easy to push through the Loka Sabha any Constitutional amendment required to implement election pledges."

Once in the course of the electioneering campaign an interviewer had asked Indira Gandhi, "What is the main issue involved in this election?" and she had replied, simply and subjectively, "*I am the issue*". And it was true that the opposition—comprising of the Princes, the big capitalists and industrialists, the old guard of the Syndicate Congress, the Jana Sangh, the Swatantra and other like-minded independents—had subordinated their ideological differences of aim and approach to their combined hatred and fear of Indira Gandhi continuing to be in power. *Indira Hatao*<sup>1</sup> was their slogan with which they had unitedly fought the election, pandering to propaganda tactics which amounted to down-right slander and vilification.

And yet it was an over-simplification to say that Indira Gandhi's personality was the only issue. What was at issue was what she had come to symbolise. Except for a few chronic cases of Nehruphobia, no one was really against her *personally*. After all, the Syndicate stalwarts had voted her to power, almost all had welcomed her elevation to the Prime Ministership in 1967; except the Communists no one had seriously challenged her decision when, on the advice of Asoka Mehta and in deference to the American capitalists of the World Bank, she decided to devalue the Rupee in relation to the Dollar. Many of them had applauded her when years earlier, as Congress President, she had advised the dismissal of the Communist-led Coalition Ministry in Kerala, even against the wishes of her

1. "Remove Indira", in reply to her slogan of *Gharibi Hatao* (Remove Poverty).

father and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

What turned them against her was her correct reading of the causes of Congress debacle in the 1967 elections—that the voters had abandoned the Congress because it had abandoned past pledges and promises—and her resolve to redeem at least some of those pledges and thus to reclaim the old prestige and position of the Congress. Vested class interests which were threatened by measures like bank nationalisation and the abolition of the privy purses had more to do with their opposition to her than any so-called dictatorial traits in her character and personality.

The election result, of course, was a thundering vote of confidence in the Prime Minister. Those who had shouted *Indira Hatao* (Remove Indira) had themselves been rejected by the electorate. The mass of the voters had come to see her, to hear her, to know her attitudes, her policies and her programmes, they had been impressed by her incredible energy, her courage, her simplicity, her humility, her directness, and her genuine concern for the people. They liked her, and they voted as she wished them to do. But it was more than her personal victory. It was, rather, a vindication, and a popular endorsement, of the policies and programmes of radical economic reform which was popularly (not scientifically) called "Socialism" or the "Socialist pattern of Society". The voters were, in effect, saying to Indira Gandhi, "Go ahead. We are with you."

Not unconnected were other factors which contributed to the victory of the revitalised Congress—the energy and dynamism of the youthful cadres who had been inducted in the organisation, the defection, and demotion of the old "Bosses" who had given the Party a bad image, and the enthusiastic support given by a sizable section of the country's intellectuals and the intelligentsia. There was also the tacit support the Congress got from at least some of the Leftist parties—specially the C.P.I.—with whom it was working together in several states!

But actually, it all came to this. Indira had become inspired and revitalised after she made up her mind to adopt the forward-looking policies and programmes. And, in her turn, she had inspired the youth, the women, the intellectuals, the middle-class intelligentsia, the workers and the peasants,—in

short the average non-committed citizen—to vote for candidates who, like Indira Gandhi, supported these policies and programmes. It was as simple as that, despite the efforts of Indira Gandhi's detractors to find the "Nehru Charisma" at work in the elections of 1971—while they know that the same Charisma absolutely failed to work in the elections held in 1967.

Indira Gandhi secured for her Party 350 seats out of a total of 518 in the Lok Sabha, about 120 more than the New Congress had after the Great Divide. Without electoral alliances and understandings with their Leftist supporters, the Congress had won a decisive majority which would enable it to carry through any legislation that required a two-third majority, without depending on the support of any other party. Her principal opponents had been humbled by the electorate. Among the Big Guns that would no more harass her in Parliament were S. Nijalingappa, S.K. Patil, M.R. Masani, Balraj Madhok, Raj Narain and Tarkeshwari Sinha. In the few states which had gone to the polls, the result had been encouraging, though not to the same extent. Congress had at last wrested the initiative from C.P.M. in Bengal.

*Socialist India*, the A.I.C.C. weekly, thus analysed the election results, editorialising enthusiastically and almost lyrically :

The voting pattern that has emerged shows that the people are discriminating and sophisticated. They did not waste the votes on the regional and caste-bound parties. Nor on pompous politicians, capitalists, retired military generals, rank communalists, fading maharajas and extremists. The soundness of their judgment can be understood properly by studying the election results. The Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, the B.K.D. in U.P., the Akalis in the Punjab and others like them have been rejected.

The people of India have given their mandate to the Prime Minister and they have strengthened her position because she was able to establish rapport with them. Out of this harmony between the People, the Party and the

Prime Minister will emerge a symphony of long-awaited socio-economic reforms that will make India a model in the comity of nations.

Indira Gandhi had reason to be happy, and satisfied as she viewed the political horizon. She had had communion with the people, and now there was a compact between them. In return for their trust and their faith, which they had democratically expressed by giving her effective Parliamentary majority that she desired and that she needed, she had promised, on behalf of her Party, that she would carry through her policies and programmes, to improve their conditions. Through stability which the people had assured her she would be able to democratically achieve Socialism. Or would she?

But beyond the frontiers of India, there were forces at work that would undo, or at least postpone for a considerable length of time, these plans for the happiness and well-being of the Indian people. On the very day the election results were announced in India, there were massive student demonstrations in Dacca for a "socialist and sovereign Bangla Desh". There was a complete strike in all public and private establishments. Thousands of young men jammed the streets shouting *Joi Bangla* and urging Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to declare independence.

This was nationalist Bengalis' reply to the arrogant ultimatum issued by Yahya Khan, the military dictator of Pakistan who had declared: "Let me make it absolutely clear, no matter what happens, as long as I am in command of the Pakistan Armed Forces and Head of State, I will ensure complete and absolute integrity of Pakistan. Let there be no doubt or mistake on this score." Foreign correspondents reported from Dacca that Pakistan was finding itself "poised on the very brink of civil war". And, prophetically, a huge banner displayed at a mass meeting addressed by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared in bold red letters: "The dialogue is over. The battle begins" !

## 6

### The Birth Of A Nation

*Rise, Awake....  
Break, demolish,  
Kick away the tyrants' throne /  
Not destruction but revolution.  
Revolution ! Revolution !  
History's blood-dripping banner,  
Is fluttering, and  
The Sun-bright revolution is here !*  
—NAZIM MEHMUD  
(*Young Bangla Desh poet, 1971*)

DESPITE WHAT PAKISTANI PROPAGANDIST MIGHT HAVE SAID, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India did not *invent* the mass upsurge for democracy and autonomy in East Bengal which culminated in the birth of Bangla Desh.

Nor did she *invent* the mass killings of Bengalis by the Pakistan military, which irretrievably doomed, and drowned in pools of blood, all chances of ever again keeping the two wings together. And she did not certainly *invent* or *imagine* the ten million helpless, hapless, wounded and destitute refugees who, over the months, abandoned hearths and homes, and trekked across the border into India, to escape the murderous marauders of the West Pakistan army of occupation.

As the housewife in charge of the world's second largest kitchen, she was overwhelmed by the sudden responsibility of having to provide food and shelter to a crore of uninvited guests, who would pour in a steady stream into her already overpopulated eastern provinces. But as an Indian, and as a Nehru, she could not turn away the helpless victims of terror who, in their simplicity and faith, had turned their faces towards India, and towards Indira.

It was, perhaps, not a coincidence that her tremendous victory at the polls was almost immediately clouded over by the problems of war and peace, of the influx of millions of refugees from terror, who had to be provided with succour out of the strictly limited resources of the Indian people. The spectre of Pakistani rulers' malevolence seemed to be doggedly haunting every constructive step that India—and Indira—had taken before, during and after the crucial elections in India.

Three months earlier, in December 1970, a rare event happened in Pakistan. The elections to the federal Parliament and provincial assemblies were held. It was an unusual occurrence in a country where a succession of military dictators had ruled in place of the people's elected representatives. The result of the elections were announced in Pakistan in the same week when Indira Gandhi decided on a mid-term poll. And, to the dismay and discomfiture of the West Pakistani overlords, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (twice jailed nationalist leader of East Bengal) and his Awami League had won a resounding victory.<sup>1</sup> The people of Bengal had thus demonstrated their support for the six-point programme of the Awami League's

1. The Awami League had secured 160 out of the 162 seats allotted to the Eastern wing, and thus gained an absolute majority in the National Assembly of 313 members from all provinces of both the wings. The Party also captured 291 seats out of 300 in the provincial Assembly.



election manifesto.<sup>1</sup> These points did not contain a demand for immediate secession, but included virtual autonomy for the eastern wing, only two subjects—defence and foreign affairs—handed over to a Federal Government that would have 56 per cent Bengali representation. A joint statement to the Press signed by 70 newly-elected members of the National Assembly from West Pakistan supported the six point programme of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Unnerved by these events, the Military dictator, Yahya Khan, and the political leaders of West Pakistan, including the so-called Leftist Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, started a series of prolonged and time-consuming negotiations with Dacca which were calculated to postpone, side-track or suppress the eastern wing's demand for autonomy.

Apart from the sharp East-West differences on the question of autonomy, there was also the difference in each side's attitude towards India. While chronic and consistent anti-Indianism was the stock-in-trade of almost all political parties of West Pakistan, the Bengalis were known for their friendly disposition towards India. That is why their leaders were suspect in the eye of military rulers of West Pakistan—Sheikh Mujib had even been tried for being an "Indian agent" in the

1. The Six-Points, which summed up the Bangla nationalists' demand for self-determination and autonomy, were :

1. The constitution of Pakistan must be federal with a parliamentary form of government and a legislature directly elected on the basis of adult franchise.
2. Federal subjects to be limited to defence and foreign affairs.
3. There should be (i) separate currencies for the two Wings, freely convertible into each other ; (ii) in the alternative, one currency subject to statutory safeguards against flight of capital from the East to West Wing.
4. Power of taxation and revenue collections to be vested in the federating units ; the Centre to be financed by allocation of a share in the State's taxes.
5. Separate foreign exchange accounts to be kept for East and West Pakistan, the requirement of the federal government to be met by the two Wings in proportion or on any other fixed basis as may be agreed upon.
6. Self-sufficiency of East Pakistan in defence matters—an ordinance factory and a military academy to be set up in the Eastern Wing, the federal naval headquarters to be located in East Pakistan.

**Agartala Conspiracy Case.** Ayub Khan, in his Autobiography *Friends Not Masters*, had gone on record to say that the Bengali Muslims "have been and still are under considerable Hindu cultural and linguistic influence." In his ignorance of cultural values, the ex-dictator had equated the passionate love of the Muslim Bengalis for their beautiful language with "Hindu" influence. There is no doubt, however, that the comparatively more educated and culturally conscious Bengalis, did share a sense of cultural kinship with Indian Bengal, and did not suffer from the virulent and chronic Indophobia from which the West Pakistani politicians suffered.

While India—and Indira—were preoccupied with the elections, publicly debating the virtues of Socialism, and Bangla nationalists like Mujibur Rahman were insisting on the widest autonomy, which was the popular mandate from their people, the leaders and leader-writers of West Pakistan were obsessed with their anti-Indian tirades which was not coincidental. It was the only way, they hoped, they could divert the attention of the Bangla nationalists and autonomy-seekers.

In the first week of February 1971, while Indira Gandhi was filling her nomination papers in Rai Bareilly, an Indian Airlines Fokker Friendship, on a scheduled flight from Srinagar to Delhi, was hijacked by two Indians, Ashraf and Quraishi, and landed at Lahore airport. Within half an hour, the Lahore newspapers had brought out special editions, and the local Radio Station had interrupted its scheduled broadcasts to welcome the hijackers, and to gloat over the event, which was claimed to be a master-stroke of Pakistani strategy. Public excitement was sought to be whipped up, but not many people took the trouble to make the long trek to the airport, preferring to see the Indian plane on the TV screens. Of course, Pakistan Government officially and diplomatically claimed to have no connection with, or even knowledge of, the hijacking.

But the next day the morning papers were full of biographical details of the two hijackers, which were obtained from the same—and, obviously, official—source. By a peculiar feat of clairvoyance, Mr. Bhutto who was then in Dacca, having abortive political talks with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, managed to land at Lahore airport just in time to have a televised meeting

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6. Self-sufficiency of East Pakistan in defence matters—an ordinance factory and a military academy to be set up in the Eastern Wing, the federal naval headquarters to be located in East Pakistan.

**Agartala Conspiracy Case.** Ayub Khan, in his Autobiography *Friends Not Masters*, had gone on record to say that the Bengali Muslims "have been and still are under considerable Hindu cultural and linguistic influence." In his ignorance of cultural values, the ex-dictator had equated the passionate love of the Muslim Bengalis for their beautiful language with "Hindu" influence. There is no doubt, however, that the comparatively more educated and culturally conscious Bengalis, did share a sense of cultural kinship with Indian Bengal, and did not suffer from the virulent and chronic Indophobia from which the West Pakistani politicians suffered.

While India—and Indira—were preoccupied with the elections, publicly debating the virtues of Socialism, and Bangla nationalists like Mujibur Rahman were insisting on the widest autonomy, which was the popular mandate from their people, the leaders and leader-writers of West Pakistan were obsessed with their anti-Indian tirades which was not coincidental. It was the only way, they hoped, they could divert the attention of the Bangla nationalists and autonomy-seekers.

In the first week of February 1971, while Indira Gandhi was filling her nomination papers in Rai Bareilly, an Indian Airlines Fokker Friendship, on a scheduled flight from Srinagar to Delhi, was hijacked by two Indians, Ashraf and Quraishi, and landed at Lahore airport. Within half an hour, the Lahore newspapers had brought out special editions, and the local Radio Station had interrupted its scheduled broadcasts to welcome the hijackers, and to gloat over the event, which was claimed to be a master-stroke of Pakistani strategy. Public excitement was sought to be whipped up, but not many people took the trouble to make the long trek to the airport, preferring to see the Indian plane on the TV screens. Of course, Pakistan Government officially and diplomatically claimed to have no connection with, or even knowledge of, the hijacking.

But the next day the morning papers were full of biographical details of the two hijackers, which were obtained from the same—and, obviously, official—source. By a peculiar feat of *clairvoyance*, Mr. Bhutto who was then in Dacca, having abortive political talks with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, managed to land at Lahore airport just in time to have a televised meeting

with the hijackers. Already they were being hailed as freedom-fighters from Kashmir. Bhutto literally patted them on the back, and added fuel to the fire of fanaticism by delivering a tirade against India which was given full coverage by the press, radio and television.

Bhutto seemed to welcome this opportunity to share the lime-light of the hijackers, because he had returned empty-handed from Dacca. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had delivered a public snub to him by saying to the Press that "after having talks with the most important leader from Punjab and Sind, I would now like to talk to leaders from NWFP and Baluchistan," thus cutting Bhutto to the size of a provincial leader, not the spokesman of the entire West Wing. The respective reactions of the two to the hijacking were significantly different. While Bhutto welcomed and pruned it, Mujib condemned it and demanded an enquiry into the whole affair, seeing in it an attempt to sabotage the democratic transfer of power to the Bangla people.

When the 'plane was blown up, with the connivance, if not the abetment of, the airport police the pro-Mujib Dacca daily *The People* suggested that Bhutto had a hand in the blowing up of the 'plane. He had met the hijackers just before the 'plane was destroyed, and certainly encouraged them. *The People* suggested that Bhutto and others were out to escalate tension between India and Pakistan in order to prevent a Constitution guaranteeing the democratic rights of the people of Bangla Desh from being drawn up and promulgated.

The hijacking, and blowing up of the Indian plane, led to the banning by India of overflights of Pakistan civil and military planes across Indian territory. Later on, with morbid hindsight, the same Mr. Bhutto who had publicly patted the hijackers at Lahore airport, and other Pakistani politicians and propagandists, were to accuse the Indian authorities—and even Indira Gandhi, by name—of having engineered the hijacking through secret agents. To lend credence to this charge, the Islamabad administration went through the motions of arresting Ashraf and Quraishi who, only weeks ago, had been lionised as freedom-fighters!

The forced detour, adding several hundred miles to Islama-

bad's only air-link with the Eastern wing, certainly placed a heavy strain on the Pak economy, as well as the military plans of the Pakistan government to keep down the national upsurge of the Bangla people, and prevented prompt and large-scale reinforcements to be flown from Rawalpindi to Dacca. But then the military dictatorship had itself to blame for blowing up the hijacked I.A.C. plane, and thus inviting the retaliatory Indian ban on overflights by Pakistani aircraft. But so plausible seemed this fantastic and morbid theory that several people in India also were taken in by Pakistani propaganda, and actually started giving credit to Indira Gandhi for her allegedly Machiavellian strategem of hiring secret agents to arrange the hijacking, so as to cripple Pakistan's military machine before it could be used against the people of Bangla Desh !

During the week that India was celebrating the electoral victory of Indira Gandhi, no less momentous than Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's triumph three months earlier, events were racing to a climax in Dacca. Repression had already begun, even while political negotiations were going on. At a mammoth rally in Dacca, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman accused Yahya Khan of "large-scale massacre of the most precious flowers of Bangla Desh—our youth—by West Pakistani military," and gave a call for civil disobedience. There was a complete strike in all private and public establishments. Thousands of students came out in the streets shouting *Jai Bangla* slogans, and demanding that their leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, give a call not for autonomy but complete independence.

While Indira Gandhi was preoccupied with the task of reforming her government and discarding some of the deadwood, while infusing new blood into her Cabinet, a thousand miles away in Dacca, the political temperature was rising to a boiling point. The day Yahya Khan, unable to cope with the eastern wing's autonomy demand, announced the indefinite postponement of the National Assembly session, promulgation of Martial Law and appointment of Lt.-General Tikka Khan (known already for his brutal repressive measures in Baluchistan) as the military governor, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman announced his Party's assumption of virtual control of civil authority in "Bangla Desh"—a name that would charismatically move his people.

Meanwhile, every day military reinforcements were pouring into Dacca—by the long air route via Ceylon, and by naval ships through Chittagong harbour. But the people were not sitting idle. Torch-light processions paraded the streets every night, led by militant youth and students, shouting slogans like *Sashok-goshti Khatam Karo, Bangla Desh Swadhin Karo* (Finish the ruling class, liberate Bangla Desh). This was to strengthen the hands of Sheikh Mujib and other Awami League leaders who were still carrying on talks with the military dictator who had his own reasons for prolonging the oft-postponed talks. As it appeared later, he was waiting for his military contingents to reach strategic points. On the night of March 25, when he was satisfied that the army was in a position to suppress the popular movement, Yahya Khan abruptly left for Rawalpindi, tanks rolled into Dacca in the darkness of the night, Tikka Khan ordered the arrest of Sheikh Mujib in the early hours of the morning, and arrangements were made to deport him to a secret prison in West Pakistan. A bloody massacre of Bangla nationalists and intellectuals was ruthlessly undertaken by the West Pakistan Army—the Bangla officers and men of the East Pakistan Rifles had already rebelled and joined the nationalist forces.

Only a few days earlier, the newly elected Lok Sabha had convened amidst scenes of great enthusiasm for the Leader, the Party, and the Programme which had brought about the momentous transformation. Among the members of the ruling party were a hundred new faces, most of them vibrant, youthful faces. The President, in his Address, had referred to the results of the elections as “a massive mandate for change, peaceful change that must swiftly and visibly alter the picture of poverty and alienation in our country,” and reflected the determination of Indira Gandhi and her colleagues in these words: “My Government has been returned to office on the clear pledge that the Central objective of our policy must be the abolition of poverty.” This unequivocal re-statement was greeted with thunderous applause.

But a week later, on the morning of 31st March, there was a solemn hush over both Houses of Parliament—the Lok Sabha

and the Rajya Sabha—when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi rose to move the resolution expressing the nation's determination to help the people of Bangla Desh in their struggle for freedom and national self-respect.

Expressing, on behalf of the people of India, the "deep anguish and grave concern," she declared that "this House cannot remain indifferent to the macabre tragedy being enacted so close to our borders," and summed up the feelings of the entire Indian people who "have condemned in unmistakable terms the atrocities now being perpetrated on an unprecedented scale upon an unarmed and innocent people."

In profoundly moving and soul-stirring words, the resolution went on to emphasize the significance of Bangla Desh as an issue of vital concern to the conscience of the entire humanity :

This House expresses its profound sympathy for, and solidarity with the people of East Bengal in their struggle for a democratic way of life. Bearing in mind the permanent interests which India has in peace, committed as we are to uphold and defend human rights, this House demands immediate cessation of the use of force and the massacre of defenceless people. This House calls upon all peoples and governments of the world to take urgent and constructive steps to prevail upon the Government of Pakistan to put an end immediately to the systematic decimation of the people which amounts to genocide. This House records its profound conviction that the historic upsurge of the 75 million people of East Bengal will triumph. The House wishes to assure them that their struggle and sacrifices will receive the whole-hearted sympathy and support of the people of India.

As Indira Gandhi read out this statement (which was later passed, not amidst applause but with a solemn and unanimous chorus of "Yes"), and afterwards as she sat listening to the impassioned speeches of her own Partymen and veterans of the Opposition, the strain of the moment was visible on her face. Since her Shantiniketan days, she knew and loved Bengal, the Bengali language, and the Bengali people. Those who were being slaughtered in Dacca and elsewhere in East Bengal



no faceless ciphers and symbols, but living men and women, the like of whom she had met and talked to, and befriended, during her many visits to East Bengal before the Partition of the country.

Sitting grimly silent, she found it difficult to control her emotions, weighted down as she was by the responsibility that, both subjectively and objectively, she felt for the tortured Bangla people. As if from a far distance, she heard the doyen of Communist M.P.'s, Professor Hiren Mukerjee, declare in impassioned tones, "Bangla Desh is bleeding in a thousand wounds because its people have risen in a kind of revolution almost without precedent in history." She looked up and, almost involuntarily nodded assent as Professor Mukerjee concluded, "From the land of Gandhi, we salute the people of Bangla Desh, who have brought about this glorious revolution."

She knew a little more than the other M.P.'s about the serious implications of what had happened, and was happening, in East Bengal. From her intelligence sources she knew that the people to a man had, indeed, risen against the military tyranny. But the people were practically unarmed, and were being subjected to an unprecedented reign of terror. Thousands of them had been killed, and tens of thousands driven out of their homes. Already, a thin trickle of refugees had started crossing the border into India. In less than eight months, this trickle would become a flood, and the thousands would become lakhs, millions, ten million ! Indira Gandhi was no prophet, but she saw the grim writing on the wall. Could she, could India, do something to stop this bloodshed without resort to war ? Would the world community heed the moving appeal of the Indian people, which they had made in the resolution that had just been passed ? And in the event of war, what would happen to the programmes of social justice and economic regeneration of the people which, she had pledged, would be started and implemented in the quickest possible time ? The more she thought about it, the gloomier seemed the prospects. Indira Gandhi could not sleep that night.

News out of Bangla Desh was pitifully little at that time. The foreign correspondents had been expelled on the very second

day, and a strict censorship clamped down on outgoing despatches. The Dacca Radio was, for some time, in the hands of the revolutionaries, but soon they had been overpowered, many of them were executed, and the Radio station turned over to Pakistani propagandists. Still bits and pieces of news did manage to come across, and what one gathered by piecing them together was horrible enough. According to an eye witness account of the first day's killings by a correspondent of Radio Australia, "there were heaps of corpses lying all around the road leading to the University." There were many such roads in Bangla Desh.

While Indira Gandhi was deeply moved by the plight of the East Bengalis, she was even more concerned about the likely repercussions on India, on her own people. The 'hawks' in Parliament were already demanding that she declare war upon Pakistan, and had there been less of a statesman in the Prime Minister's House, the war with Pakistan could have, and would have, started in April, 1971. But how long could she delay, or postpone, the confrontation which, in the opinion of many political and military observers, was becoming inevitable?

Refugees continued to pour into West Bengal and the other Eastern states like Assam, Tripura and Manipur, on an average, 30,000 per day—nearly ten lakhs or even more every month—bringing with them incredible tales of brutality and inhumanity. They brought enormous problems of providing even the rudimentary food, shelter, clothing, sanitation and medical aid. Whatever India (and India's Indira) could do for the hapless millions was being done for them. In the incredible difficulties she faced, Indira Gandhi was sustained by the knowledge that the heart of the hospitable Indian people had been touched, and they would not mind tightening their own belts to spare the necessary food and succour for the refugees. That was the ancient tradition of compassion that Indians had inherited from Gautama the Buddha, but allied to it was the feeling of solidarity that Jawaharlal Nehru had inculcated in them for every victim of imperialism, colonialism and other forms of racial and national exploitation.

After independence, Nehru had used his enormous international prestige and powerful voice on behalf of countries of

Asia and Africa and supported their demand for independence. Bangla Desh, after all, was India's next-door neighbour, with whose people the people of India had fraternal bonds of history, culture, language and literature. Could Nehru's daughter and successor allow the Bangla people to be crushed under the jack-boots of their military oppressors?

Soon the verbal and emotional expressions of sympathy were to be translated into practical and tangible terms. In response to the appeal of official and non-official relief organisations, voluntary donations of money and materials poured in from every side to provide relief to the in-coming refugees. But public response, however generous, could only be inadequate. The Government of India had to bear the main brunt of the responsibility of looking after the refugees. To finance the gigantic relief organisation, it was decided to place a Levy on purchase of a great many commodities of daily use—whether you were buying, a plane ticket, a train ticket, a cinema ticket, postal stamp, a packet of cigarettes, or even a match-box! It was for the first time in human history that a whole people had cheerfully, and uncomplainingly, agreed to bear a heavy burden of taxation to provide relief of millions of homeless refugees, expelled by force from a neighbouring country. Indira knew her people, and knew that the burden would be heavy and hard for them, but that they would bear it without protest, out of the compassion of their hearts.

The appeal to the conscience of humanity that India—and Indira—had addressed to the leaders of the world powers, first through the resolution passed by Parliament, and later through her trusted emissaries, including senior Ministers, who toured the various countries to explain India's stand on the issue of Bangla Desh, did not evoke the response that was expected, so far as most of the Heads of Governments were concerned. Britain and America continued to hold that it was an internal matter of Pakistan. So did the other Western powers. The only country that responded positively to India's urgent messages was the Soviet Union. President Podgorny sent an outspoken letter to Yahya Khan of Pakistan, diplomatically admonishing the Pakistan President for the genocidal terror

that had been let loose by him in Bangla Desh. It was hailed in the Indian press as a "major break-through in the freedom-fighters' efforts to enlist world sympathy for their cause." The *Times of India* welcomed this important diplomatic move in these words: "The Soviet Government is, indeed, the first outside the sub-continent to have come out openly against the bloody course on which the military junta in West Pakistan has embarked to stifle the voice of the 75 million people of Bangla Desh."

If other world statesmen chose to be disdainfully or discreetly silent, for political reasons or out of diplomatic niceties, the world press—including the American press—gave full coverage to the pitiful stories of the millions of refugees seeking asylum in India, as also to the heroic resistance of the Mukti Bahini guerillas who, with moral and material help from India, and taking a leaf out of the book of Vietnam, were becoming more daringly effective in constantly harassing the army of occupation. Discrediting Yahya Khan's boast that "the army is in full control of the situation in East Pakistan. It has crushed the mischief-mongers, saboteurs and infiltrators," the American weekly *Newsweek* commented, "Alas for Yahya, the facts told a different story. Throughout East Pakistan, the embattled Bengali resistance movement seemed more determined than ever to prove that it was alive and well—and capable of making life extremely difficult for the heavily armed but thinly spread occupation forces of the Pakistan army.... Taking advantage of a crash training programme and of weapons and ammunition supplied by India, the *Mukti Bahini* (Liberation Army) went on the offensive. Factories were sabotaged. Key bridges were toppled by well-placed dynamite blasts. And railroad locomotives operating on the relatively few remaining routes were blown off the tracks by mines."

Clare Hollingsworth of *Daily Telegraph* of London had already predicted that Bangla Desh would become another Vietnam, with Islamabad holding the cities and towns and Mujib's men in control of the countryside. But within a few weeks the Mukti Bahini guerillas were active not only in the cities and towns but had made their presence felt even in Dacca by blowing up one of the transformers in the local power

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house, plunging the city in darkness for more than six hours.

As early as April 17, the Indian and the world Press had been invited to the simple, austere but dramatic ceremony at which, the birth of a new sovereign Bangla Desh was proclaimed at a village in the Kushtia district, not far from the Indian border. Several thousand peasants were present to listen to the declaration of freedom and sovereignty, and to witness the green, red and golden flag of the new Republic which was being born amidst the green paddy fields, but not too far from the booming guns of the Pakistan artillery.

In that mango grove, for this historic ceremony, were present at least a hundred of the elected members of the National Assembly who had risked their lives to secretly travel to this little village which henceforward would be known as Mujibnagar. This was also the first time the world press saw with their own eyes the tough young men of the *Mukti Bahini*, the guerilla force, and its commander, Colonel Usmani. The ragged guard of honour saluted Syed Nazrul Islam, the Acting President of the People's Republic of Bangla Desh, in the absence of President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Other cabinet ministers were also present, as the declaration of independence was read in the presence of Indian and foreign correspondents.

Some of them were indiscreet enough to mention the name and position of this village in their despatches, and the very next day the Pak Air Force bombed the place and destroyed the village and the mango-grove. But they could not destroy the will to be free and independent that, a day earlier, had been dramatically manifested here. However long the struggle might take, the Republic of Bangla Desh was now a reality. There would be no turning back.

Indira Gandhi knew this, and all her days and nights were devoted to tireless efforts to help emergence, and the consolidation, of the free and sovereign Bangla Desh. But she resisted the attempts to stampede her Government into granting *de jure* recognition to the provisional Government. Before that could be, much political and diplomatic spade work had to be done, and at least some world powers had to be won over to accept the reality of the situation. India still main-

tained diplomatic relations with Pakistan—and, technically and formally, what happened in a part of that country was an "internal affair" of Pakistan, even as the Western Powers were insisting. Indira Gandhi knew that she would have to "make friends and influence people." She would have to appeal, to explain, to pressurise the world powers to understand the moral, humanitarian and political implications of the Bangla Desh struggle—specially the repercussions of the refugee influx on the economy and security of India.

Meanwhile, there were these helpless, homeless, wounded and starving people who had come to India, seeking shelter and help. Her immediate concern was their rehabilitation. Towards the middle of May she visited Assam, Tripura and West Bengal, in her own words, "to share the suffering of the refugees, to convey to them the sympathy and support of the people of India and to see for myself the arrangements which are being made for their care."

She saw, and reported to Parliament, how every available building, including schools and colleges, had been requisitioned, thousands of tents had been pitched and temporary shelters were being constructed as quickly as possible in the 335 camps which had been established up to that time.

"So massive a migration in so short a time is unprecedented in history," she said with great feeling not unmixed with anger, "About three and a half million people have come into India from Bangla Desh during the last eight weeks. They belong to every religious persuasion—Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian. They come from every social class and age group. They are not refugees in the sense we have understood this word since Partition. They are victims of a war who have sought refuge from military terror across our frontier." She warned the Lok Sabha that the cost of the relief would exceed several crores of rupees, even for six months, and would impose an unexpected burden on the Indian exchequer.

Revealing the Nehru temper, she said, "It is mischievous to suggest that India has had anything to do with what happened in Bangla Desh. This is an insult to the aspirations and spontaneous sacrifices of the people of Bangla Desh, and a calculated attempt by the rulers of Pakistan to make India a scape-



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goat for their own misdeeds."

For once she wanted to reveal the whole story to her people and the people of the world, and to show how what was claimed to be an internal problem of Pakistan had, indeed, become an internal problem of India.

These twenty-three years and more, we have never tried to interfere with the internal affairs of Pakistan, even though they have not exercised similar restraint. And even now we do not seek to interfere in any way. But what has actually happened? What was claimed to be an internal problem of Pakistan, has also become an internal problem for India. We are, therefore, entitled to ask Pakistan to desist immediately from all actions which it is taking in the name of domestic jurisdiction, and which vitally affect the peace and well-being of millions of our own citizens. Pakistan cannot be allowed to seek a solution of its political or other problems at the expense of India and on Indian soil.

Has Pakistan the right to compel at bayonet-point not hundreds, not thousands, not hundreds of thousands, but millions of its citizens to flee their homes? For us it is an intolerable situation. The fact that we are compelled to give refuge and succour to these unfortunate millions cannot be used as an excuse to push more and more people across our border.

Using bitter irony to put the Western democracies in the dock, she said: "We have heard much talk of democracy.... But when democracy is so flagrantly and so brutally being destroyed, we do not hear much comment, nor do we see the sort of spontaneous strong responses which the situation warrants. Could there be a greater or a clearer expression of democracy than the one we witnessed in the election in Pakistan?"

However, she added, that Indians are told by some countries that, while they may disapprove of what is being done by the military rulers of Pakistan, they cannot be a party to its disintegration, and pointedly asked, "Is it suggested that we wish the disintegration of Pakistan?... If there is a struggle between the two parts of Pakistan, it is certainly not of our

making but of the rulers of Pakistan. Is it anybody's contention that the brutal methods being used today can achieve any integration or stability worth the name now or in the future?"

She made it plain that if the Indian people were so agitated over the events in Bangla Desh, it was because of a calculated genocide that was resulting in the killing of tens of thousands of innocent people and also forcing many more to seek refuge and shelter in India, and concluded, "It is a problem that threatens the peace and security of India and, indeed, of South-East Asia. The world must intervene to see that peace and security is re-established and maintained."

She and the other leaders of India repeat this argument again and again, but the cynical world powers would not pay heed to the warnings from New Delhi. The only thing that Indira Gandhi could do was to mend and strengthen her fences, reinforce her army and keep it in a state of preparedness, asking her people to sacrifice a little more for the cause of their suffering neighbours, and to organise the tremendous task of refugee relief—the biggest migration ever recorded in history of any part of the world.

As the refugees continued to pour into India—three millions, four millions, six millions, seven millions—the small and already overcrowded border states bursting at the seams with the additional population, and Indira's plans of national reconstruction put in cold storage while the emergency—with its enormous extra and unproductive expenditure—was extended from month to month. The Prime Minister kept her cool through this period of worry and anxiety, with the attendant tensions and stresses. But the narrow strip of grey in her hair widened, and lines of anxiety appeared on her handsome and hitherto uncreased face. It is said that for several months Bangla Desh and its consequences for the people of India were her constant companions, and virtually monopolised all her attention.

And yet, just in order to survive, even a tough and resilient Prime Minister must occasionally relax and unwind, have some diversion from the daily grind of work, worry and responsibility. One day Indira Gandhi agreed to face the TV cameras for an unusual programme the like of which had not been

clothes, medicines and funds for Bangla Desh. This meant duplication of worth-while voluntary effort. She wanted a central committee to mobilize the energy and the sympathy of the entire people, as that way they would be able to effectively and efficiently help their Bangla Desh brethren.

So her mind was back at the original problem. What could she, what could the people of India, do to ensure the speedy achievement of the freedom and well-being of the people of Bangla Desh, and also to protect the peace and security of India. Was war the only solution? The young Bangla guerillas of the *Mukti Bahini* were carrying the war into their enemy's camp. For them it was an issue of sheer survival. But another India-Pakistan war? She still refused to believe that it was inevitable in the circumstances. Even if it was to come, this was not the time and the moment to gamble with the destiny of millions. There must be some other way, she thought as she came away—strangely revived and re-invigorated—from the TV meeting with a cross-section of her people.

August is a memorable month in the history of the national movement in India. On August 1 (1920) the great patriot, scholar and statesman Balgangadhar Tilak died at Bombay and, at his funeral, the veteran leaders of the nation re-dedicated themselves to the ideals of complete independence. On August 8 (1942) the "Quit India" resolution was passed by the Congress, again in Bombay, and in the early hours of August 9 the Congress leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad and Sardar Patel, were arrested and secretly transported by a special train to the old fort in Ahmednagar. It was, symbolically enough, on August 15, 1947, that India became free.

The month of August in the year 1971 was filled with more than one momentous event, each of which was marked with the stamp of Indira Gandhi's liberal and dynamic personality. On August 2, the Lok Sabha passed the Bill legalising abortion on grounds of medical and mental health, with only two members opposing a measure that quite a few so-called advanced countries of the West have not yet had the vision and the courage to pass.

On August 4, with 384 voting for the Bill and only 23

against, the Lok Sabha passed, amidst thunderous cheers, the Constitution (Twenty-fourth) Amendment Bill, reasserting Parliament's power to alter any part of the Constitution. The Prime Minister, who commended the Bill to the House, said that it marked another milestone in the progress of Democracy and Socialism in the country.

On August 9, 1971, the Prime Minister introduced the Constitution (Twenty-sixth) Amendment Bill to abolish privy purses and privileges of the former rulers. This, too, was later passed. And also on the same day (which saw, twenty-nine years ago, the launching of the final struggle for freedom) was signed the momentous Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation between the Republic of India and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic.

This treaty, historic as it was in terms of its international impact, did not mark the beginning of a new kind of relationship between the two countries. Ever since the time that India became free, friendly relations between India and USSR had existed, developed and matured into many-faceted co-operation in the fields of economics, industrialisation, agricultural revolution, cultural exchange—and in the sphere of common endeavours for Peace in all the international forums. But the Treaty spelled out in formal and concrete terms the situation as it existed, and as, it was hoped, it would develop, between the two countries.

Considerable spade-work had been done to fashion the basic principles of the Treaty. What invested it with historical significance was its timing. The Treaty came into being when the situation in the sub-continent was full of tension, and the possibility of armed conflict had darkened the political horizon. D P. Dhar, with his understanding of the interplay of international forces, and under general guidance from his Prime Minister, had worked steadily during his tenure as India's Ambassador in Moscow, to bring about an awareness of the necessity of a Treaty of this kind in order to prevent the sub-continent being turned into a theatre of war.

The Soviet leaders had grasped the historical significance of the nature of relations between India and the Soviet Union

and were desirous of raising it to new and higher levels. When Kosygin came to India to attend the funeral of Dr. Zakir Husain, he gave expression to the wish of the Soviet leadership to raise the level of the political, economic and cultural relations between the two countries and to find an appropriate mechanism for doing so. At that time few in this country noted the implications of Kosygin's observations. But Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had taken in hand the reconstruction of the basic tenets of India's foreign policy in the light of changing international situation. Her deep understanding of the historical forces led her to think of a qualitatively different basis for broadening the friendly ties between India and the Soviet Union. Among her close advisors, Dhar was eminently suited to interpret to the Soviet leaders her fundamental world-view because he, like the Prime Minister, was firmly convinced that closer relations between India and Soviet Union constituted a guarantee of peace in this troubled region of the world.

Even after he returned to India, Dhar kept in close touch with the Indo-Soviet developments. He was intimately involved in discussions that went on between the two sides for giving shape to the new content of Indo-Soviet relationship. He visited Moscow on August 2, 1971 to carry forward the discussions to their conclusive stage. Throughout these dramatic months Prime Minister Indira Gandhi gave him full support for clinching the various issues involved, including the crucial issue of timing. The Soviet leaders, on their part, showed great understanding of the new situation with which India had to contend since March 1971. It was due to their unqualified support for an arrangement which strengthened peace and which safeguarded the security of India that the Treaty became an accomplished fact in August 1971.

The aim, on both sides, was to hammer out a treaty with no secret or suspicious clauses, which would emphasise the friendship and cooperation which already existed, and which both the countries hoped to develop further, but which would also serve notice on the mischief-mongers and war-makers in the international community that the two great countries and their peoples were closely bound to each other, mutually ready and willing to come to the assistance of either party whose freedom

and security was threatened.

Thus, in the historic Conference Room attached to Prime Minister's office, and under the motto of the Indian Republic blazoned on the wall, spelled out in golden letters—*Satyameva Jayate*—Truth Shall Prevail—the suave and sophisticated A.A. Gromykov, the Foreign Minister on behalf of the Government of U.S.S.R., and grey-bearded, turbaned Sardar Swaran Singh, the External Affairs Minister on behalf of India, sat down to sign the treaty that, within an hour, would be the urgent talking point in all the chancelleries of the world, including Washington, London, Peking—and Islamabad.

After formal re-affirmation of friendship and goodwill, and their mutual interest in maintaining peace between nations, both the countries condemned "colonialism and racialism in all forms and manifestations" (which by implication, included the colonial role and rule of West Pakistan in East Bengal) and reaffirmed "their determination to strive for their final and complete elimination," the two parties declared that they shall "support the just aspirations of the peoples in their struggle against colonialism and racial discrimination." The sting, however, was in its tail. Articles IX and X concretised the point and purpose of formalising this *Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation*, as it was extended to the military sphere :

Each High Contracting Party undertakes to abstain from providing any assistance to any third party that engages in armed conflict with the other Party. In the event of either Party being subjected to an attack or a threat thereof, the High Contracting Parties shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to remove such threat and to take appropriate effective measures to ensure peace and the security of their countries.

Each High Contracting Party solemnly declares that it shall not enter into any obligation, secret or public, with one or more States, which is incompatible with this Treaty. Each High Contracting Party further declares that no obligation exists nor shall any obligation be entered into, between itself and any other State or States, which might cause military damage to the other Party.

And on the same day, August 9, a million Indians—men,



women and children—marched the two miles from Ramlila grounds to India Gate to express their faith in their Prime Minister's policies, to demonstrate their solidarity with the cause of Bangla Desh and to give expression to their great concern for the safety of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the leader of Bangla Desh, languishing in a Pakistani prison, under a virtual sentence of death. The solemnity of the occasion was relieved by the exuberance of the people. There were Bhangra folk dancers from the villages of the Punjab, buglars from Uttar Pradesh, flute players from Rajasthan, who all sang, played their instruments and danced their way in a festive spirit.

The procession was led by D. Sanjivayya, the youthful Congress President, and it terminated in a mammoth rally at the India Gate where the rostrum was dominated by two gigantic portraits of Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to symbolize the unity and solidarity of India with the cause of Bangla Desh.

The slogans, displayed and shouted at this rally, were significant. Indira Gandhi's *Garibi Hatao* (Remove Poverty) had been changed to the Plural Affirmative: *Garibi Hatayengay* (We Shall Remove Poverty) and there was a new rhyming, *Samajvad Layengay* (We Shall Usher In Socialism).

The meeting which was addressed by Indira Gandhi demonstrated the enthusiasm of the people for the cause of Socialism, and for the cause of Bangla Desh, but when she announced the Indo-Soviet Treaty in her speech, the massive applause indicated the joyous enthusiasm of the people who knew now that at last India was not alone! The people knew that the Treaty was a shot in the arm for both India and Bangla Desh.

Responding to the call, *Delhi Chalo* (Let's go to Delhi) many humble people from villages came to the nation's capital for the first time in their life.

Paindha Ram, a peasant from Sangrur, Punjab, who had come with a Bhangra group, demonstrated his hands to the reporters. "Look at my hands," he said, opening out his earth-coloured palms on which deep brownish lines were etched, "I have been continuously drumming the whole day, while our dancers have been dancing!"

Why did he come to Delhi? He was asked, and replied,

"Not only to see a spectacle. I did not want Indira Gandhi to feel that the people for whom she was doing so much and making so many enemies were not behind her."

That was a new commitment between the people and the Prime Minister. It was fascinating and frightening to see the people's faith in, and devotion to, Indira Gandhi. The burden of responsibility must have been awesome to her, too, as she stood and addressed the people from the rostrum, symbolically situated at the intersection of Jan Path (the Path of the People) and Raj Path (the Path of the Government) !

## On Top Of A Volcano

*My nationalism is intense internationalism.*

—MAHATMA GANDHI

*I cannot shake hands with a mailed fist.*

—INDIRA GANDHI

AS EARLY AS JUNE, 1971, IN AN INTERVIEW GIVEN TO AN ITALIAN TV team, Indira Gandhi stressed the responsibility of the international community towards the people of Bangla Desh, who, in their millions, were "fleeing from a most callous, inhuman and intemperate butchery, a terror organized by the State military apparatus." She urged "greater world sympathy for the vast number of sufferers—those who are in East Bengal and those who have fled here."

Through other diplomatic means she had tried to rouse the world conscience in order to avert the disaster which seemed to be coming nearer, with every new wave of refugees who numbered eight millions by the time the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship was signed. Now, before it was too late, she decided to make one last personal effort to make the world see the grim reality of the situation, with its dangerous implications.

There were many, even in her own Cabinet and among her closest associates, who tried to dissuade her. With war clouds hovering over the Indian horizon, they said, this was no time

for the Prime Minister to be absent from the country for several weeks. But Indira Gandhi was determined to establish a personal contact with world statesmen, to make one last attempt to use international influence to restrain Pakistan's military rulers.

In August, on hearing that Yahya Khan had announced the impending secret military trial of Mujibur Rahman without affording him any foreign legal assistance, she had sent an urgent message to all Heads of Government warning them of her apprehension that "this so-called trial will be used only as a cover to execute Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (that) will aggravate the situation in East Bengal and will create a serious situation in India because of the strong feelings of our people." She appealed to all of them "to exercise your influence with President Yahya Khan to take a realistic view in the larger interests of the peace and stability of this region." It was perhaps this appeal which saved the life of the Banga Bandhu, for even the most cynical of the world statesmen could not but let Yahya Khan know that such a course would have fatal and fearful consequences. But now, in September-October 1971, Indira Gandhi would personally deliver her appeals and her warnings to the Heads of the principal world powers.

The visit to Moscow was to be a curtain-raiser to Indira Gandhi's international peace mission. Arriving, within six weeks of the signing of the Soviet-Indian Treaty, she was assured not only of a cordial welcome but of sympathetic understanding of India's case. She found the leaders of USSR already in agreement with much of what she had to say.

Understandably, the Treaty gave her a valid talking point. "The Treaty," she said in her very first speech at an official luncheon in Moscow on September 28, 1971, "has been widely acclaimed throughout our country and in the Soviet Union. Even the traditional critics of Indo-Soviet friendship in various parts of the world have recognised the importance of the Treaty." She admitted, however, that "there are some in India and abroad, who are trying to misinterpret its meaning and purpose."

Tracing the history of friendly and trustful relations between the two countries, she recalled: "Long before we

liberated ourselves from colonial rule, we admired the great experiment of social reconstruction which you had undertaken in your country, the results of which we can see around us. The Indian people respect the vision which has inspired your achievements. In the same way, I should think that your regard for India springs from your recognition of our aims, endeavours and our potentiality."

Then she plunged into a masterly analysis of the events in East Bengal and how they imperilled the peace and stability of India. The General Election held in March, she said, brought greater clarity to our national scene and gave a firmer direction to our political life. "We were all set to launch the second phase of our national development during which the promise of equality and freedom from want could come closer to reality." Just at that crucial moment "beyond our borders there occurred events which have created incalculable difficulties for us." There was a grave confrontation between the people of East Bengal and the Government of Pakistan, and the actions of the Pakistan Army have compelled millions of people to leave their homes and to seek shelter in India. "More than nine million East Bengalis have come into our country. Do they not have the right to live and work in their own homeland? We cannot be expected to absorb them."

This, she declared, is not an Indo-Pakistan dispute. But its burden has fallen on India with her limited resources already strained to the maximum. "The problem is an international one," and she politely delivered a reprimand. "The international response has fallen short of the scale which a grim tragedy of this magnitude demands. It is surely the duty of the world not to delay in creating conditions in which these refugees irrespective of their religion can return without fear." But, she conceded, "the leaders of the Soviet Union have counselled Pakistan to reach a political solution which will satisfy the aspirations of the people of East Bengal."

In another speech in Moscow, to dramatise the influx of the refugees, she said, "We have today in our country foreign nationals in numbers large enough to constitute the population of New Zealand and Sweden combined."

This, then, was to be the burden of her speeches, polite but

firm, which, with local references and the up-dating of information about (for instance) the number of the refugees, she would deliver in the six other countries that she would visit a month later.

Back in India and four days before she set off for Western Europe, she held a press conference which was attended by a record number of Indian and foreign correspondents.

Answering a question why, when Pakistan is asking for United Nations intervention, the Government of India has been refusing it, she said there was a great difference between what was happening on that side of the border, that is in Bangla Desh, and on our side of the border, that is in India.

Then she elaborated how, since India had nothing to hide, the refugee camps and the border areas were open to responsible foreign visitors. Ten representatives of the U.N. High Commissioner for Relief were already working there. The Indian and even the foreign press was free to visit the refugee camps or the border areas. Sympathetic or merely curious foreign dignitaries including Members of Parliament, Social Workers and representatives of the international Relief organisations, had come from the U.S.A., Canada, Latin America, New Zealand, the Middle East and Japan. "Obviously," she commented, making an obvious comparison with the situation in Pakistan, "there is nothing that we want to hide, or that we can hide, in the sort of society which we have in India."

At the end, someone asked a loaded question: "When are you going to grant *de jure* recognition to Bangla Desh?"

But she was not an amateur to place her cards on the table, and answered. "I do not know....When we think the time is ripe for it."

Her calm self-confidence seemed to grow, even as the situation became more tense and serious. A colleague of hers told me how she was always confident that eventually the refugees would go back to a life of freedom and dignity. She said so in April when they had just started coming, and said it again in August when the refugee influx was over four million and everyone else was doubtful about India's capacity to solve this problem. She said it again while she was preparing to go abroad.

"Now they are nine millions—Soon they will be ten millions!" her colleague reminded her sceptically. "No, they will go back," she answered, as if thinking aloud, "they must go back!"

In a broadcast to the nation, on the eve of her departure abroad the Prime Minister shared her thoughts with the nation. "One cannot leave with a light heart at such a moment. Our country is facing danger. Yet after much thought I decided to undertake the journey. The invitations were of long standing and it seemed important in the present situation to meet leaders of other countries for an exchange of views and to put to them the reality of our situation." She did not say it in so many words but her purpose was also to demonstrate to the world the stability and peaceful intent of her Government. Shaky dictators, or war-mongers planning an aggression against a neighbouring country (as Pakistan was repeatedly alleging), do not—indeed, cannot—afford to be absent from their country for a crucial period of twenty-one days.

In her first speech at the Institute of International Relations in Brussels, she spoke of the pressing problems her countrymen were facing in the larger, historical, perspective. "The world is one, but each of us sees it from a different angle. There is the national point of view, which depends upon its geographical position and its historical evolution.... For two centuries or more, Europe dominated the world. In the present century, the United States and later the Soviet Union came to share this influence. Only after World War II did Asia become a factor in European thinking. Africa appeared on the world scene a little later."

Only after sketching this background, she mentioned the new crisis that had brought her there. Over nine million people of East Bengal—practically equal to the population of Belgium, she did not fail to remind her audience—"have been terrorised and persecuted by the military rulers of Pakistan, and have been pushed inside our territory, jeopardising our normal life and our plans for the future!"

These speeches were only the public manifestation of the talks that were taking place between the Prime Minister of

India and the leaders of the Belgian Government. According to an Indian correspondent cabling from Brussels, "Indira Gandhi was able to convince the Belgian Prime Minister, Gaston Eyskens and the Foreign Minister, Pierre Harmel about the urgent necessity for a political solution of the Bangla Desh problem acceptable to the people of Bangla Desh." Moreover, the Belgian Government agreed to contribute substantially to the funds for the relief and rehabilitation of the refugees who were now over nine millions. The Belgian Prime Minister said in a statement: "We in Belgium clearly realize that the problem raised by the presence of so many refugees in India can only be solved with the participation of the international community."

The donations for refugee relief were welcome, but the more significant decisions were diplomatic. Belgium assured the Indian Prime Minister that no military supplies had been made available to Pakistan either through Government or private commercial channels. Belgium further agreed to suspend economic aid to Pakistan particularly in regard to the construction of a nuclear reactor till normal political conditions in Pakistan were restored. Since Belgium was a member of the U.N. Security Council, and also of the Aid Pakistan Consortium, its sympathetic understanding of India's view-point in the developing Indo-Pakistan crisis marked the initial success of Indira Gandhi's mission.

A rousing reception awaited her in Vienna—her next port of call. Children of the local Indian community in colourful costumes greeted her with shouts of *Indira Gandhi Ki Jai*. The Austrian Chancellor Dr. Bruno Kreisky welcomed her as he warmly shook hands with her. By a happy coincidence she had arrived in Vienna on Austria's National Day. There was a jolly holiday crowd in the streets. The people, who were waiting for her, lined the route to her hotel and cheered her as she passed. She smiled to acknowledge the popular greetings, but the shrewd Viennese noticed a serious and care-worn expression on her face.

The next day, addressing a distinguished gathering at a banquet given in her honour, she recalled her earlier visit to Vienna



in 1955 when she had witnessed the remarkable re-birth and reconstruction of the war-ravaged country. She paid a handsome compliment to the great and historical city which must have touched a responsive chord in every Austrian heart. "Vienna is beautiful in any season. Its ethos vibrates with the music of great masters, and the thought impulses of authors and philosophers. It is a city of the mind in a special sense, for here it was that men at the frontiers of knowledge delved deep into the human mind to discover insights that were to revolutionise the patterns of modern thought."

"In Austria," she said, introducing the problem on India's borders, "you have the experience of dealing with refugees. So you can perhaps imagine the burden of looking after an influx which is of the size of Austria's own population? Despite the Indian tradition of hospitality and the genuine desire to help their neighbours in distress, we cannot accept this charge as a permanent one."

She struck a different note at the beginning of her speech at the Austrian Society for Foreign Policy and International Relations. Exposing the popular European myths and misconceptions about India, she said that usually when people think of India "they either think of the bejewelled fabulous Maharajas, or of the abject poverty of the people. Or they think that we are idealists whose philosophy has not much relevance to the realities of the day. Perhaps it is all true, but it is only a very small part of the picture of a vast country." We have our problems, she said, but they are not all problems. There is art and culture, music and dancing, "and even amongst the poorest people you will find laughter and joy in life."

Many wise and perceptive writers and scholars, at various times, have tried to explain to outsiders the riddle of India. Her father, perhaps, was the most successful—because he was rational, spoke a modern, scientific language. How well did she paraphrase him with a turn of phrase peculiarly her own. "India is a land of many contradictions, existing in different countries, people strongly asserting themselves yet fearful of any fundamental change. There is a constant clash between tolerance and dogma, between the basic Indian values and the superficial habits of dress or ritual. To all this has been added

the new clash, which perhaps all countries face, which is the struggle between the forces of status quo and the forces of change."

She was honestly self-critical, too, even in the presence of a foreign audience. Talking about the inevitable end of feudalism all over the world, she mentioned the abolition of absentee landlordship in India. "But I must confess that our land reforms legislation is not adequate yet in all the States, because this is not a central, federal, subject, it is a state subject. And I myself am exasperated by the slow implementation of even the land legislation which has been passed in some of the States."

India's foreign policy of Non-alignment, she frankly stated, "is not identical with Austria's policy of neutralism." The Indian concept of Non-alignment did not mean being neutral or unconcerned with what was happening. "It merely meant that we would not join a military bloc, and we would not be guided by any other country."

That brought her to the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship which was then being criticised in the Anglo-American press as an abandonment of India's policy of Non-alignment. Indira Gandhi reminded them that "one of the clauses of the treaty specifically mentions that the Soviet Union acknowledges India's policy of non-alignment and that the treaty will not interfere with it." She also quoted President Tito's approval of this treaty, for he was one of the co-founders of the non-aligned group.

It was only then that she brought up the "serious situation which has developed in the last seven months on our borders," and explained in detail that the situation constituted a threat not only to stability in India but to world peace.

Even before leaving the Austrian capital, she had reason to feel satisfied that her speeches, which were widely broadcast, were having some effect on public opinion. A woman vegetable-seller gave her flowers and a small donation. Children collected their pennies and forwarded them to her; saying it was for the refugee children of Bangla Desh. She was cheered and applauded wherever she went, and many unknown people stopped her on the street to express their sympathy for India and for the cause of Bangla Desh. The refugees in the camps

could not hope for a better propagator of their cause than the Prime Minister of India.

Besides the public speeches and receptions, she, and the high officials including the Foreign Secretary T.N. Kaul, accompanying her, had serious and wide-ranging discussions with their Austrian counterparts, most of the time being taken up by the problem of Bangla Desh refugees in India. One positive result of these talks was that the Austrian Chancellor undertook to write to General Yahya Khan urging upon him the desirability of a political solution of the Bangla Desh crisis. Though diplomatic etiquette prevented the Austrian Government leaders to say openly that they agreed with the Indian assessment of the situation, the Chancellor, Dr. Kreisky, gave more than a hint when, in a talk with the Indian correspondents accompanying the Prime Minister, he said that the refugee problem could not be solved on a bilateral level but only through international effort. He significantly added, "I do not want to be partisan, but nobody can tell me that ten million people have left their homes for no reason." Indira Gandhi, with her gentle proddings and discreetly-worded statements, was beginning to make a dent on the consciousness of Europe.

Indira Gandhi arrived in London on the day—October 28, 1971—on which the British Parliament took the historic decision to join the European Common Market, ending her imperial isolation of several centuries, and having lost her empire, making a bid to play a role in a United Europe. BRITAIN IN E.C.M. : was the big news of the day. Still her visit provoked tremendous public interest, which was sustained for several days. Almost all the important papers, specially the weeklies, published articles not only about her personality, but about her mission on behalf of Bangla Desh. Some of these were quite sympathetic to India and to the Bangla people, specially the *Spectator*. This well-known independent political weekly wrote, "With Mrs. Gandhi in London this week, it is of great importance to British statesmen...to anticipate that the worst of the present disaster has yet to be seen; and to appreciate the great fortitude and skill with which Mrs. Gandhi and her people have handled the situation."

Conceding that "the will of the present government of Pakistan to restore its sundered state is powerful, and incalculable," the *Spectator* reminded its readers and the British government, "Likewise, the will of Bangla Desh insurgents to create a new nation on the periphery of Central Asia is also both powerful and incalculable." For once a British journal of opinion was forthright and unequivocal. "If a decision for action is taken, then it must be a decision to support and comfort India. It is India which bears a burden that ought to lie on the world's conscience, it is India's stability which is most threatened by the refugee influx... If there is to be a departure ...it must be departure on the side of India."

British diplomacy, however, was not prepared to go beyond "inoffensive" expressions of sympathy and goodwill. During her stay in London, she had long discussions with the British Prime Minister and other Ministers. According to a press report, Sir Alec Douglas-Home wondered whether, even at this late stage, it was not possible for Yahya Khan to have a dialogue with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and Indira Gandhi countered that that was for Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the people of Bangla Desh to decide. While the confabulations were secret, some inkling of what transpired could be gained from some of the replies to a large number of questions that Indira Gandhi gave after her speech at the Britain-India Forum meeting at India House, London.

She was asked, "Since you have come to this country, do you think the British Government is cooperating to solve the problem of Bangla Desh?" and she replied, "The British Government have expressed their sympathy and have shown considerable understanding of the situation. As to what they can do, only they themselves can figure out."

When someone specifically asked her "if there was a fundamental difference between the British and Indian approach to the Bangla Desh problem," she parried the question: "There is bound to be a difference of approach because if we have a flood, the water is in my home, whereas you only read about it. There is bound to be a difference in the thinking of two countries, because of the geographical situation of the two countries" and then she spiritedly added, "now our point is

that what is happening there does affect the entire world. It is not a matter which concerns merely Pakistan, or merely India and Pakistan, but long-range repercussions can be world-wide. Also we expect from the British people, with their love of freedom and all just causes, a far greater understanding and involvement in a question of this kind."

She was asked, "What sort of pressure do you envisage that other countries could put on Pakistan to ameliorate the situation in East Bengal so that the refugees can go back?"

She knew her own mind, and her answer was prompt and pointed. "Well, Pakistan has been getting help, military and economic, from other countries, and I think that had this been made clear at the beginning that they would not get support in this adventure or misadventure that they are indulging in Bangla Desh, this matter would not have gone so far."

Another question—and the answer to it—repeated an argument that was becoming all too familiar, so that there was a note of irritation in the Prime Minister's forthright words.

One of the British correspondents said, "I think there has been universal admiration for the way that India has coped with the problem of looking after the refugees. But some people are confused as to why India will not accept as large United Nations presence in the refugee camps as Pakistan has suggested. Why won't India accept this?"

"If I may deal with the admiration part first," said Indira Gandhi, "it is a little bit of an irritant because, well it is nice to be admired, but if people think you say a few flattering words and that is enough, well it is not—because we are getting the verbal admiration and it seems to us the others are getting the more material help!"

"So far as the U.N. Observers are concerned," she repeated what she had already said before, "we already have ten people. Ours is an open society, no censorship on newspapers, no kind of limitation or restriction on who will visit the camps and everybody does. What would be the purpose of more U.N. personnel? It is only a device, I think, of Pakistan to show that India and Pakistan are on the same level. This is what we resent. It doesn't matter if a hundred U.N. people come. But, quite frankly they will be able to do nothing. But apart

from that, what we resent is the two countries being put on par."

As she was coming in for this meeting, outside the hall she saw some Pakistani young men parading with placards which read, WHY ARE YOU PREVENTING THE REFUGEES FROM GOING BACK? Relating this incident she said, "Now I think that must be the joke of the year. To think that we would prevent anyone going! We are trying desperately hard that these people *must* go back. We are not going to tolerate them on our soil."

Towards the end of this meeting she once again referred to the effort to equate India with Pakistan: "We are tired of this equation which the Western world is always making; it does not matter what Pakistan does; India and Pakistan are equal. We are not going to stand for this kind of treatment."

While she was in London, she was in daily contact with India. Since she had left there was no hopeful improvement of the situation. The influx of the refugees had actually increased—from 30,000 per day to 40,000 and even more. On one particular day as many as 63,000 had crossed the Indian border, each with his own tale of horror to relate. Pakistani soldiers while chasing the Bangla Desh guerillas, had several times intruded into Indian territory, and the situation was both tragic and tense. Would she be able to complete her tour of the six countries she had undertaken? Or would she have to cut short her programme and rush back home? She was even advised to return to India from London, and to cancel the further engagements. But to do this would be to escalate the tension, to encourage panic. So, whatever happened, she must remain calm, and unless the war actually broke out because of Pakistani provocations, she must fulfill all her engagements.

While she was about to board the plane for New York, at the London airport she was asked what was the latest situation like. She replied, "I am sitting on top of a volcano, and I do not know when it is going to erupt."

With this feeling of time running out she arrived in Washington. Relations between India and U.S.A. were, in the words of

*Time* newsmagazine, "at their lowest point since India won independence in 1947, largely as a result of the (American) Administration's continued arms shipments to Pakistan." But statesmen and diplomats wear smiling masks even when their inner selves are seething with resentment and distrust.

President Nixon gave the Indian Prime Minister a formal welcome on the South Lawn of the White House, with all the trappings traditionally associated with receptions accorded to visiting Heads of State. Trumpets heralded the arrival of Indira Gandhi, and flags of U.S.A. and India fluttered in the crisp autumn wind. A Guard of Honour was duly reviewed by the Indian Prime Minister, accompanied by the U.S. President.

In his welcome speech, Richard Nixon declared: "Today we stand in Washington on November 4, a winter day. In our country we call this kind of day Indian Summer—a good omen for our countries." The U.S. State Department was not happy with the Soviet-Indian Treaty and its implications. The President made one obvious allusion to it when he said that India and America were bound by a "profound morality that does not need a legal document to make it live."

Indira Gandhi, even in her formal reply, while formally thanking the President and his wife, was frank and forthright and did not mince her words:

"It has not been easy to get away at a time when India is beleaguered. To the natural calamities of drought, flood and cyclone has been added a man-made tragedy of vast proportions. I am haunted by the tormented faces in our overcrowded refugee camps, reflecting the grim events which have compelled the exodus of these millions of refugees from East Bengal."

In this, and her subsequent speeches that she made in Washington, she was initiating a new style of carrying on delicate international relations. It was to reduce the flowery formalities to the minimum and to publicly state the fundamental and controversial issues which normally statesmen diplomatically avoid mentioning in their public utterances.

And so as she stood there on the White House lawn, facing a battery of television cameras, she said into the microphones,

and her voice was carried into millions of American homes : "I have come here looking for a deeper understanding of the situation in our part of the world, in search of some wise impulse which, as history tells us, has sometimes worked to save humanity from despair."

This open and direct diplomacy, this taking of a democratic public into confidence on crucial national and international issues, has been the special contribution of Indira Gandhi. It marked every utterance that she made in Washington—indeed, throughout this tour. It was not the conventional way to "make friends and influence people"—and nothing could shift the pro-Pakistan *tilt* of the Nixon Administration as, later, the Anderson disclosures were to prove. But in winning the sympathy and understanding of large sections of the American public and the American press for the Indian view-point and for the cause of Bangla Desh freedom, Indira Gandhi, single-handed, accomplished a stupendous public relations job. Said *Time* newsmagazine : "Mrs. Gandhi's handsome bearing, forthright manner and ranking as the world's largest democracy (pop. 547 million) won her new friends in Washington—and new support."

At the White House banquet, she told Mrs. Nixon in an aside how she and her colleagues organised the elections at short notice because she was tired of people telling her : "You are the minority government. You have no right to do this and you have no right to do that." So, she said, "All right, let's have elections." Later, in her after-dinner speech and on other occasions, she spoke of her country without undue humility, rather with confidence and a certain amount of pride in her people.

During the General Election last March (to which President Nixon had referred in his speech), she said, "Our people demonstrated the ability of the democratic process to find answers to national problems. They gave the nation a clear and coherent sense of direction, of renewed self-confidence in, and a fresh impetus to our long struggle against poverty."

She acknowledged the "important" contribution of foreign aid, specially U.S. aid. "But," she added, "the effort in the progress of our country is overwhelmingly and increasingly that



of labour and sacrifices of our own people."

She narrated how "suddenly our entire world changed. What seemed to be a part of sunlight, just waiting for us to go ahead and solve the problems which remained, was covered with a very large dark shadow. And without warning, a major crisis erupted across our frontiers, and night engulfed us, seriously threatening our hard-earned stability." After referring to the grim genocide<sup>1</sup> which led to millions of uprooted East Bengalis to cross the borders of India, she dramatically asked, bringing the reality of the Bangla Desh refugees relevant and understandable to the people of America: "Can you think of the entire population of Michigan State suddenly converging on to New York State? Imagine the strain on space, on the administration, on services such as health and communications, on resources such as food and money, and this not in conditions of affluence, but in a country already battling with problems of poverty and population." Alluding to the U.S. publicists' and administration's attempt to treat India and Pakistan on par, she said, in the presence of the U.S. President, "Our people cannot understand how it is that we who are the victims, we who are bearing the brunt and have restrained ourselves with such fortitude should be equated with those whose actions have caused the tragedy."

This is how far, within the bonds of politeness and diplomacy, she could go in her speech at that glittering dinner party hosted by the President of the United States. But the next day at the Washington Press Club, there was an even more outspoken expression of the Indian view-point, a freer give-and-take with the correspondents, and no holds were barred.

"I have not hesitated sometimes to criticise the press," she said at the outset, "But on this occasion, I should like to express appreciation of the manner in which the press correspondents of many countries have tried to arouse the conscience of the world." She referred to their courage and perseverance in

1. Later in her address to the Columbia University, New York, Indira Gandhi struck an apposite note. "Perhaps you have heard that the biggest concentration, the biggest attack was on the University of Dacca, where a large number of faculty and students were killed on the very first night."

lifting the veil around East Bengal, and revealing the truth of the grim tragedy being enacted there. "Your words have been honest and direct," she said and paid a special compliment to the photographers who were able, through their harrowing pictures, "to convey the very essence of sorrow and misery."

She was again asked if the "new Indo-Soviet treaty takes India out of the camp of the neutrals," and she spiritedly answered, "India has never been in the camp of neutrals...Non-alignment does not mean being neutral or unconcerned, or ignoring what is happening in the world." It merely meant that India does not belong to a military bloc and reserves the right to judge each international issue on its own merits, not because the U.S. was supporting it or the U.S.S.R. So the Indo-Soviet treaty, she emphasized, does not affect India's position as a non-aligned country. "So we are not allowing military bases to any country"—making an indirect but pointed allusion to the U.S. bases in Pakistan! "And while, under the treaty, we shall consult with the Soviet Union should any dangerous situation arise, it is entirely a matter for India to decide what decision we make, what steps we take."

Knowing that India had protested against continued U.S. arms supply to Pakistan, a correspondent asked, "If the U.S. halt all military supplies and economic assistance to Pakistan, what would be the immediate consequences in the context of the political solution that you believe might be helpful? Do you think it would force President Yahya Khan to move into talks with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or other elected representatives?"

She replied, "I certainly think that the U.S. and some of the other big powers are in a position to exercise persuasion on this problem in the East."

Asked to reply to the charge that India was giving sanctuary and arms and training to the guerillas and the liberation forces, she was not perturbed.

"Well, quite frankly," she said calmly, "We do support the people of East Bengal in their struggle...(But) this movement of guerillas grew on its own. Perhaps you know that it is based on the para-military forces belonging to East Bengal: that is the East Bengal Rifles and the East Pakistan Regiment. This

is the basis of the movement. It is they who are training the young people. They must be coming into Indian territory, I think they do sometimes. But they are not entirely based in India. The guerilla activities are all over East Bengal, quite far from the Indian borders, so obviously they have the most tremendous and single-minded support of the entire people of East Bengal, in spite of the retaliation on these villages by the army."

No one present raised a voice against her assessment of the situation, for they knew the truth was as the Prime Minister was stating it.

Indira Gandhi, again like her father, has a special feeling for France. During her schooling in Switzerland and in England she had learnt to read, write and speak French, and she has kept up her interest in French literature. Whenever any French-speaking statesman or reporters come she likes to speak to them a few words in their own language. The polite French gallantly say that her French accent is *tres bon*.

From Washington she retraced her winged steps back to Europe, and landed in France on November 7. The next day she was the guest of honour at a luncheon given by the President and Madame Pompidou. Responding to the President's toast, she recalled the last sad occasion when "I came in haste and in sorrow" to attend General de Gaulle's funeral. "He was a man of great stature, who embodied the honour of France at a time of trial. We in India respect and salute him."

Indian leaders, she said, have always viewed their national problems in the larger international perspective. She recalled India's persistent hostility to the concept of Cold War. "We welcome the *detente* in Europe. We are glad that China has at long last been admitted into the United Nations, and the United States and China are beginning a dialogue." To achieve this end, she acknowledged the contribution that France has made by her "foresight and statesmanship of the highest order."

A prosperous and progressive India would be an important part of this new peaceful world, and the last general elections

created the conditions for political stability and a more rapid economic advance. Briefly, she sketched hopeful the situation in India when, just a week after the general election as the new Parliament was meeting for the first time, "a tremendous new burden fell upon us." And she reiterated her assessment of the situation since Pakistan began persecuting the East Bengalis to the extent that a steady stream of homeless refugees—by then numbering over nine millions—started crossing the border into India.

"We in India," she said, "have shown the greatest self-restraint. But there is no doubt that our stability and security are threatened," and she added, "The basic cause of this crisis must be found, and to be effective, it must be acceptable to the elected representatives of the people of Bangla Desh." The rest she left to the subtle and sophisticated French, with their tradition of fighting for Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, to understand and to act upon.

After detailed personal talks with President Pompidou and other French Ministers, Indira Gandhi took reluctant leave of the French capital and her plane crossed over into the Federal Republic of Germany. Bonn was the last capital on her 3-week itinerary.

While speaking at a banquet given by the Chancellor of the Republic, she recalled the old bond of friendship and goodwill between India and Germany, "which was fashioned first by poets and scholars" and paid a handsome tribute to the miracle of Germany's economic rebirth and recovery. But she reminded them that "It does seem a little ironic to us in India that Europe, which was a scene of conflict not so long ago, should have an easing of tensions, while in Asia two conflicts are continuing and a third is threatening." The very spirit of India, she reminded her hosts, was dedicated to the promotion of peace.

This was the only speech she delivered during her tour, in which she made no overt reference to the Bangla Desh freedom struggle or to the problem of the millions of refugees.

But she made ample amends for it in her speech and the questions-and-answers at the luncheon given by the

German Society for Foreign Policy. Here she gave a detailed account of her Government's economic policies aimed at the people's welfare, and foreign policy aimed at promotion of peace and cooperation with all nations. As for the Bangla Desh situation, she paraphrased it in a manner which could not fail to make its mark. In Bangla Desh, she said, "It is the majority which is saying it has not got a fair deal; it is the majority which took part in an election conducted by the present military Government of Pakistan. The majority had a programme of six points which had been clearly stated by their leaders. The programme got a huge majority." Here she put in a personal equation which is always effective. "I thought I had a very big majority—but Sheikh Mujib's majority is bigger than mine. Whereas I could form the Government in my country, he is arrested as a traitor."

Answering what West Germany could do, for once she spelled it out for them. "The German Government, along with other international Governments, could try and make the Pakistani Government see the reality and talk with the people who can answer for East Bengal. I have no authority to speak for them. It is only the accepted and elected representatives of East Bengal who can talk with the President of Pakistan or anybody else who wants to reach a solution."

Tired and exhausted by the strenuous tour, the next day she flew back to India, to the seething problems that awaited her, to the responsibility of looking after the homeless, hapless refugees that, she learnt on arrival, now neared the ten million mark. While she was flying from one country to another, during her 3 weeks absence from India, almost a million more had arrived to India with their tales of woe. But, Indira Gandhi was heartened to learn, now they were also bringing inspiring stories of their guerillas' active and defiant resistance against their oppressors. The mood of the country, even of Parliament, was restive. The signs were ominous. Would the volcano explode? But if it did, as a foreign commentator put it, "No one could say that Indira Gandhi had not tried to avert the tragedy."

On November 15, Indira Gandhi stood up in Parliament to

make a statement, summing up the impressions of her tour. Recalling that the invitations had been received much earlier, but the visits had had to be postponed due to the General Elections.

"In spite of the grave situation in Bangla Desh and along our borders in West Pakistan I undertook this visit as an earnest of our desire to leave nothing unexplored which might lead to an easing of the burdens imposed upon us, and to discourage those who are bent upon finding excuses to threaten our security."

Her visit, she said, had enabled her to exchange ideas with the Heads of government and leaders and moulders of public opinion, on matters of universal interest, but "more specially on the situation in Bangla Desh and the threat it is posing" to peace in India and the sub-continent. She had sought to remove certain misunderstandings, but there was only one positive gain she had to report: "After a long period of tragic indifference and sheltering behind the thinly disguised legalistic formulations that it was merely an internal affair of Pakistan, there is now a growing sense of urgency in seeking a solution. Most countries also realize that the release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is essential and intend to impress this upon the military regime of Pakistan."

Four days later, on November 19, it was her birthday. Indira Gandhi was 53 years old. She received numerous greetings and congratulations from high and low, hundreds of telegrams and letters poured through the post offices. One of them was from Suresh Kapoor, a young boy from Solan in the Simla Hills who wrote not only to wish his "Respected Auntiji" many happy returns of the day, but volunteering to forsake his studies and to join the army in case of a national emergency. Promptly she wrote back to say that "We should not speak lightly of war. But it is obvious that our people must, at all times, be prepared to defend the nation's security and freedom. The best way of doing this is to ensure that all essential national activities continue as normally as possible."

Discouraging the student from giving up studies, she commended the example of the heroic people of London and Stalingrad who continued to live for years under acute war

conditions, "This is the spirit we want in our country."

Just a letter of birthday greetings, just a reply dictated in a hurry. But the unknown student knew—as the Prime Minister knew—that the fatal explosion was imminent.

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had their near and dear ones still there in Dacca or Chittagong, or in one of the villages, living (or dead ?) under the terror of West Pakistan military rule.

They were all now listening to the not-so-young not-so-old woman who was their Prime Minister, and who was addressing them in Hindi or rather, Hindustani, a simplified idiom that would one day be understood all over the country. Not all of them fully understood her Hindi speech, and yet they felt that she was speaking aloud their innermost thoughts and feelings—their fears and apprehensions, their compassionate fellow-feeling for the people of East Bengal, and their resolute determination to do everything to help the youngsters of the *Mukti Bahini* to liberate their homeland.

*Bhaiyo aur behno* (This is how she had begun her speech), You are all aware of the crisis that the country is facing today....

*Today* ! The day, she thought even as she was speaking, had been like any other day—full of comings and goings, arrivals and departures, meetings and conversations. She had got up early, and after a perfunctory breakfast had to rush through her morning programme of unscheduled meetings with the common people who wanted to see her without appointment. At 8.30, at her own residence, she had met, and exchanged views with, Mr. Rashid Karamé, the eminent Arab politician and former Prime Minister of Lebanon. Her car had to race at break-neck speed, from 1, Akbar Road to Parliament House, for at nine, she had called a meeting of the Consultative Committee on West Bengal, where the problems of providing relief to the refugees had been uppermost on the agenda.

Again her car had gone racing to Palam where a special Soviet-made Tuplov jet of the Indian Air Force stood ready to take off for Calcutta, 800 miles away.

The people of Bengal (she was now launched upon the theme which had haunted her for nearly nine months) along with the people in other parts of our country, voted us into power in the last general election....(But) soon after the election, we were confronted with a situation of great crisis, a situation for which we were in

## Dove With Claws

*All warfare in which man tries to slay his brother is lamentable, but it is not that all those who go to war in a righteous cause, after having exhausted all means to preserve the peace, are blameworthy. He must be blamed who is the cause of war.*

—SAYINGS OF BUDDHA

ON THE AFTERNOON OF FRIDAY DECEMBER 3, INDIRA GANDHI was in Calcutta, addressing a mass public rally of half a million people. It was, as a reporter would later put it, "a sea of humanity which stretched as far as the eye could see."

This *maidan* had been, in the past, the scene of some exciting meetings addressed by leaders of various political parties. Today there was a subdued but all-pervasive excitement; because every one felt the dangerous implications of the events which were taking place on the border, only a few dozen miles from Calcutta.

The people in West Bengal's capital city had reason to be personally involved in the fate of Bangla Desh, for many had originally come from there, still more had relatives or friends—both Hindus and Muslims—among the 10 million refugees, most of them housed in the camps situated in the narrow strip that lay between Calcutta and the East Bengal border, and many

*The same religion !* She remembered a face she had seen in the refugee camps, which still haunted her—an old, bearded man bearing bayonet wounds, invoking the curses of *Allah* upon those who had ravished his teen-aged daughters ; this was only one out of millions of Bengali Muslim victims of the terror let loose by the Pakistan military, now given refuge in India. Who had driven out these Muslims (along with their Hindu neighbours) from their homes ? Who had given them shelter and befriended them ? Who was Hindu and who was Muslim ? Who belonged to which nation ?

The winter sun was setting early beyond the Hooghly, turning the marble facade of the Victoria Memorial ominously inky black, as she concluded :

I want to reiterate that I do not want war. I earnestly desire Peace. I know what war means in terms of human suffering. I will be the last person to start a war. But if a war is thrust upon us, we are prepared to fight in defence of our freedom and our ideals....

Unknown to her at that time, war had already started a few minutes ago, as Pakistani Air Force planes, simulating Israel's lightning airstrikes, bombed India's far-flung airfields at Amritsar, Pathankot, Srinagar, Jodhpur, Chandigarh, Ambala and Agra.

As amidst tumultuous shout of "*Indira Gandhi Zindabad*", "*Indira Gandhi Ki Jai*", and a new slogan which had already become the battle-cry of a new nation, "*Joi Bangla*", she came down from the dais, and was escorted by Siddhartha Sankar Ray, then the Union Minister for West Bengal Affairs, (now the Chief Minister of West Bengal) to her waiting car.

Reaching the Raj Bhawan, she had just started a conference with the Governor, Shri A.L. Dias, the Union Minister for West Bengal Affairs, and other high officials, on the over-all situation in the state (which was then under President's Rule) in the context of Bangla Desh developments, when a message received from New Delhi, was handed over to her by the Chief Secretary. She read it without betraying any emotion. The conference ended abruptly on a signal from the Prime Minister. Soon her car was seen racing along the wide Qazi Nasrul Islam

no way responsible but which nevertheless placed a heavy burden on our country and our people. The large influx of refugees from East Bengal seriously affected the lives of the people in West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura, and increased their hardships....(She made the problem vivid and relevant to every one of the half million present, each one felt personally involved. Why was such a large number of people—they are ten millions now—leaving their homes? We knew the truth and we told it to the world....

*The World!* She thought of all the letters she had written to Heads of State, all the emissaries she had sent to the different countries, she herself had toured six countries at a time of great peril to her country, she had made speeches and addressed press conferences, explained the dangers of the situation to Heads of Governments, to politicians, pressmen and to the general public.

"...There were many who agreed with us but did nothing in the matter." With the exception of the Soviet Union, with whom India had signed a Treaty of Friendship, and the other Socialist countries, few others had cared to understand the genesis of the Bangla Desh trouble. In the latest letter which she had sent to Mr. Edward Heath, the British Prime Minister, and to other heads of government, she had elucidated India's stand on the border incidents, and explained the reasons for India's limited military action which was taken only in self-defence when the Pakistani violations of India's border had become intolerable. Inevitably, India—and Indira—had come to a conclusion. "We believe that several countries of the world encouraged Pakistan in its anti-India posture. If the friends of Pakistan had exercised some restraint on that country, it would not have chosen the path of aggression against India...." Then she spoke how the actions of the rulers of Pakistan had belied the one-nation theory. "Religion cannot be a basis for unity. What the world is witnessing today is the victimisation of the majority by a minority professing the same religion...."

had to be done. She began scribbling notes for her broadcast.

She had to interrupt this work to let the hostess serve dinner to her. She had a momentary impulse to say she was not hungry and had no desire to eat. That was a fact. But a long life of keeping up a disciplined routine checked her from refusing nourishment. For, she knew she needed it, would need it, for the strenuous times ahead. It was a miracle of her will power that when she started eating, her appetite returned. She even enjoyed her dinner. The soldiers at the front, she reflected, had to eat at regular intervals.

At New Delhi's Palam airport, also observing blackout, she was reassured to see her two sons among the welcoming party of Ministers and officials. She learnt that the capital, too, had an air raid alert, just after dark. When the sirens wailed, and the light went out, the people, including the foreign correspondents gathered for a routine briefing, had thought it was one of the routine tests that had been staged twice a day for the last several days, and an official of the Press Information Bureau had to tell them: "This is not a practice blackout. It is the real thing." The Pakistani attack came at 5.47 p.m.—sunset time—the nearest airport to Delhi that was bombed was Agra, barely 70 miles (and a few minutes flight by one of Pakistan's Sabre jet fighters) from Delhi. Despite the sudden air attacks on military airfields, the Israel-like lightning strategy of the Pak Air Force to destroy the maximum number of Indian military aircraft on the ground was mainly frustrated, for anticipating just such an action, Indian planes had been dispersed and were safely "garaged" underground in camouflaged concrete bunkers. About an hour after the first air attacks came Pakistani artillery shells lobbing over the border in Jammu and East Panjab. The troops were also supposed to have crossed the border at Poonch.

All this she learnt during the car drive which, necessarily, had to be slower and more cautious than is usual with her, for no lights were allowed in any car—not even in the car carrying the Prime Minister of India! She listened to these details as she sat in the dark, while the moonlit silhouettes of New Delhi's landmarks flashed past the windows. So the war had duly come to India, and it was left to her, a woman, to lead her nation in

Sarani, otherwise known as the V.I.P. Road, to Dum Dum airport. On the long way she noticed that the street lights were being switched off, and she knew that it was not the chronic power failure in Calcutta. As she reached the airport, it was already shrouded in a hurriedly enforced black-out—*It was war!* That was the message that she had received from New Delhi and which was taking her back to the capital in a hurry.

The I.A.F. plane which carried the Prime Minister soared into the darkening sky, the interior lights dimmed and carefully curtained off, so that not a glimmer showed outside. But soon there was a big moon—known in air force parlance as the *Bomber's Moon*—in the cloudless sky. The 'plane, carrying its precious cargo, must be clearly visible to any other aircraft flying at the time in that area. The pilot, tense with responsibility, peered through the inky darkness for any intruding war 'planes of the enemy that had struck so suddenly. He knew, of course, that his 'plane was well-protected on the flanks by the fighters of the I.A.F. that had been hurriedly ordered to escort the Prime Minister. The pilots of the escorting planes were tense, too, for they realized the vital importance of their mission.

But within the cabin, by the light of a well-shaded lamp that fell in a circle on the papers directly in front of her, Indira Gandhi sat, collecting her thoughts for the critical broadcast to the nation that she would have to make as soon as she reached the capital. So many things had to be done, within so short a time—instructions for retaliatory action had to be issued to the three Service Chiefs, an emergency meeting of the Cabinet had to be summoned, the situation had to be explained to the leaders of the opposition parties, and then the broadcast to the nation had to be made. She had already begun to send out radio instructions to her staff in New Delhi, hoping that the other senior Cabinet Ministers who were out of Delhi were also flying back at that moment. Essentially a woman of action, rather than emotion, Indira Gandhi would only later have time to reflect upon the fateful and tragic consequences of the war. *In that moment she had time to think only of what*

Gandhi was already calmly, coolly, shrewdly, planning out her war strategy—in the first modern war, defensive or offensive, ever waged by a woman. They had called her a dove—now they would see how sharp her claws could be !

Within minutes of her arrival, she was presiding over the Emergency Committee of the Cabinet. Two of the very senior Ministers, that day, had been in different parts of India, and had rushed back by special plane on hearing of the Pakistan airstrikes. Followed a brief meeting of the full Cabinet at which emergency decisions were taken. Nearing midnight, she had a meeting with the leaders of the Opposition parties who all assured her of their unflinching support to her, her Government, and the Armed forces, during the national emergency.

Re-inforced by all these loyal assurances of her colleagues as well as her political opponents, she sat down to make a broadcast to the nation. The people had been suspensefully waiting for her voice, ever since they learnt of the Pakistani attacks, and they heard her—both in Hindustani and in English:

"I am speaking to you at a moment of great peril to our country and our people. Some hours ago, soon after 5.30 p.m. on December 3, Pakistan launched a full-scale war against us." Then she gave details of the Pak Air Force's surprise strikes at widely scattered Indian airfields, and of the artillery action against the Indian defence positions on the Western Sector. She also accused the world with having brought about this catastrophe by having "ignored the basic causes" of the struggle in Bangla Desh. "The courageous hand of freedom-fighters have been staking their all in defence of the values for which we also have struggled, and which are basic to our way of life. Today the war in Bangla Desh has become a war on India...."

"We are a peace-loving people. But we know that peace cannot last if we do not guard our democracy and our way of life. So today, we fight not only for territorial integrity but for the basic ideals which have given strength to this country and on which alone we can progress to a better future. Aggression must be met, and the people of India will meet it with fortitude and determination and with discipline and utmost unity."

The resounding "Jai Hind" with which she concluded, was

this time of crisis. She remembered Yabya Khan's contemptuous reference to her in an after-dinner speech in Islamabad: "If *that woman* thinks she will cow me, I refuse to take it. If she wants a war, I'll fight it." Now he himself had pressed the fatal button to launch a war, and it was for her to show what "that woman", with the backing of the entire Indian people, could do.

Could the war be avoided? This question occurred to her, as she was driving through the dark winter mist which was the shape of the immediate future. She thought of all the efforts she had made, her tours, her public speeches, her private talks with the leaders of governments, her pleas and appeals to the friends of Pakistan to put some pressure on them to put an end to the carnage and seek a political settlement of the Bangla Desh problem.

Fifteen months later she would tell the Calcutta journalist, Jyotirmoy Datta<sup>1</sup> that the India-Pakistan war of December 1971 could have been avoided "had the world taken some of the steps I put to them."

She was also reminded that till November 1971, the people, specially the youth of Bengal thought that Indira Gandhi was too much of a dove, that she was too restrained. Referring to a British journalist's description of Indira Gandhi as "a dove with very sharp claws", she was asked, "What made you bare your claws?"

"As you can see, I do not have any claws at all (she replied) but I think no decision should ever be taken in a state of emotionalism. At that time, most people in India, and specially in Bengal, were just steeped in emotion. Now the question was: do we give in to emotion? Or do we want to see results. My assessment was that, had we done anything earlier, we would not have had the same results, and therefore it needed some cool thinking."

By the time she was driven to the Parliament House where all her aides and assistants and secretaries awaited her, Indira

1. The interview was published in *The Hindustan Standard* of Calcutta.



Nehru. Speaking more in sorrow than in anger, she said, "Our feeling is one of regret that Pakistan did not desist from the ultimate folly, and sorry that at a time when the greatest need of this sub-continent is development, the peoples of India and Pakistan have been pushed into war. We could have lived as good neighbours but the people of West Pakistan have never had a say in their destiny."

Referring to the international community's apathetic attitude to the "annihilation of a whole people" and to "this menace to Indian security," she noted that "governments seemed morally and politically paralysed."

The statement was a political document as well as declaration of war, for Indira Gandhi was keen on keeping India's war aims strictly ideological and humanitarian rather than military :

"As the Mukti Bahini's effectiveness increased, the West Pakistani army became more desperate. Our tradition is to stand not with tyrants but with the oppressed. And so the anger has been turned upon us. West Pakistan has escalated and enlarged the aggression against Bangla Desh into a full war against India."

Preparing Parliament and people for a long struggle, she appealed for higher production, agricultural as well as industrial. "The courage and fighting capacity of the jawans have to be backed by the dedication of the farmer, the worker, the technician and the trader." She made a special appeal to writers, artistes, intellectuals and students, to defend the nation's ideals, and concluded : "We have stood for peace but peace itself has to be defended. We are fighting to safeguard our territorial integrity and national honour. Above all, we are fighting for the cause of human freedom."

Having made her, and her country's position clear, the proverbial dove of Peace proceeded to bare her claws. The Indian Air Force, in the early hours of Saturday morning, had already left its impact on the Pakistani targets. Wave after wave of Indian planes flew bombing sorties to pound the Pak air bases in the east and the west. In less than twentyfour hours the PAF squadrons in the east had been almost wholly obliterated, only less than half a dozen Sabre jets were left. The

followed by the National Anthem, and then came the radio Close-down. There was silence all over India, as the searchlights of the Anti-aircraft batteries swept across the skies, and a weary but strangely exhilarated Prime Minister, like the soldier curled up in the bunker on the front, prepared to retire for the night on her first night of the war. From a distance she heard the muffled roar of India's war planes, setting out—full eight hours after the Pak attack—to take retaliatory action against the Pakistani airfields, gun emplacements, and other military targets!<sup>1</sup>

Both Houses of Parliament—the *Lok Sabha* and the *Rajya Sabha* observe Saturday and Sunday as holidays. But immediately after the return of the Prime Minister from Calcutta, the members had been informed that there would be a sitting on Saturday. Much before 11 a.m., the scheduled time for the meeting of the two Houses, members were in their seats, talking excitedly but in hushed tones as befitted a solemn and sombre occasion. The galleries of the Lok Sabha were also packed with people, including diplomats and pressmen eager not to miss any part of the momentous proceedings.

"Exactly at 11," reported the correspondent of the Press Trust of India, "Shrimati Indira Gandbi, attired in a sober blue home-spun sari, rose and in the same solemn, composed tones which marked her overnight broadcast, apprised the people's representatives of the situation in which the nation had been placed by the 'wanton attack by Pakistan on several Indian airfields and ground forces'."

In the course of her statement, she displayed her characteristic calmness to which had been added a new determination. Instead of generating hatred and war hysteria, she spoke of the Pakistani people with compassion worthy of a Gandhi or a

1. That the first shot was fired by Pakistan on the Western front is admitted by Major-General Muqem Khan in his book *Pakistan's Crisis in Leadership*, the first Pakistani-written version of the India-Pakistan war, based on official records. In his account, Gen. Muqem claims that although Pakistan launched the attack, General Yahya Khan's indecision on launching the offensive delayed it long enough to rob it of its impact as a method of drawing Indian strength from the East Bengal front.

the Indian land armies, with the very substantial and active support of the local freedom-fighters, were penetrating deep into Bangla Desh. Now Indira Gandhi felt free to make the next political move which confirmed the historical fact of the birth of a free nation. India officially, by a statement in Parliament, which was lustily cheered, recognized the *Gana Praja Tantri*, or the People's Republic, of Bangla Desh. Thus *de jure* recognition was accorded to the provisional government some of whose leaders had been in Calcutta, while others were already organizing the people's participation in the freedom struggle within Bangla Desh.

This formal recognition was astutely well-timed, like most moves made by Indira Gandhi. "Pakistan," she announced in the Lok Sabha, "is totally incapable of bringing the people of Bangla Desh under its control." She implied why she had so far resisted the clamorous demand for according recognition to the Bangla Desh Government-in-exile, and why this was the appropriate time for it. "Now that Pakistan is waging a war against India, the normal hesitation on our part not to do anything that might be construed as intervention (in the internal affairs of Pakistan) has lost its significance."

She was able to announce that the Government of Bangla Desh had informed her that their basic principles of State policy would be the same as those of India—Democracy, Socialism, Secularism and Non-alignment. Even more significant and heartening (for the Indian people) statement was that the Bangla Desh Government "reiterated their anxiety to organise the expeditious return of their citizens who have found temporary refuge" in India.

On the same day she demonstrated her remarkable ability to turn away from the pressing political and critical military problems to devote her time and attention to something totally different and seemingly trivial. From Parliament, after making the momentous announcement about the recognition of Bangla Desh, she came home and spent an hour chatting with thirty-two children, who were prize-winners in an Essay Competition held by the Children's Film Society.

The boys and girls represented all the regions, religions and linguistic groups of India, and had come to the capital after a

Indian Army moved into Bangla Desh, in close cooperation with the regular forces of Bangla Desh and the guerillas of the *Mukti Bahini*.

A year later, Indira Gandhi was to be asked as to how she conducted the war and how the vital military decisions were taken. "This is not the kind of question that I can..." she made a deprecatory gesture, and then, on second thought, proceeded to answer the question: "The decisions were really taken by those who were actually running the war, but I was obviously in very close touch, in twice-a-day touch. On the day of Dacca's fall, I think, we got a message every few minutes."<sup>1</sup>

What she did not mention was that all major military decisions which could have political implications were invariably referred to her for approval. She gave her commanders the kind of trust, support and a remarkably intelligent understanding of the military situation that brings out the best in the fighting men and their officers. The preparations for the inevitable conflict had been made by her and her commanders much earlier. Before departing for her six-nations' tour, she had already called up the reserves, and built up India's defensive positions all along the border with West Pakistan, East Bengal and (as a further precaution) also along the border with China. She trusted God but believed in keeping her powder dry!

The 14-day war was the final test of her leadership, and she passed it with flying colours. Before that it used to be said that a woman might lead a country in times of Peace, but you needed a man in the time of war. A military officer summed-up her qualities of a quick, decisive mind, her steadfast pursuit of the main political goals as also of the main military objectives which would help secure those goals, when he said: "There is a MAN!" Editor Russey Karanjia of BLITZ, also referring to her astute and resolute leadership during the Indo-Pak war, has called her "a combination of Chanakya and Churchill."

The Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy, within two days, had established their supremacy in the skies and the seas, and

1. In an interview published in *The Hindusthan Standard*.

bases were to be used either against the U.S.S.R. or against China, or against both. But the latest India-Pakistan conflict came at a time when the U.S. was bending over backwards to appease both China and the Soviet Union. Pakistan, meanwhile, had already consolidated friendly relations with China on the basis of the mutual hatred for, and distrust of, India.

Therefore, it became, apparent now—what was rarely appreciated till then—that the American economic and, specially, military aid to Pakistan was aimed solely at weakening India. A progressive and non-aligned India, led by Indira Gandhi, aiming at Socialism and in friendly economic and political association with the U.S.S.R. and other Socialist countries, did not suit the the geopolitical ambitions and objectives of America's military-cum-financial ruling clique represented by the President.

So, from the beginning, there was an effort not only to equate India and Pakistan, the aggrieved and the aggressor, and to ignore the origins of Bangla Desh's freedom struggle, but to tilt heavily in Pakistan's favour. The State Department statement declared, without a blush, "that since the beginning of the crisis Indian policy in a systematic way has led to perpetuation of the crisis, a deepening of the crisis, and that India bears the major responsibility for the broader hostilities which have ensued." This statement was approved by the President and issued on his instructions.

The declaration, in effect, officially laid the blame on India for the war with Pakistan, without even mentioning the brutal treatment of millions of Bangla civilians by the Pakistani military regime. If the U.S. had its way, it would have got the U.N. Security Council to censure India but for the veto by the Soviet Union's Yakov Malik who held "Pakistan's inhuman repression" as responsible for the conflict.

While, later, the State Department tried to wriggle out of its anti-Indian statement, and it was even lamely explained that the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. was not "authorised" to brand India as the "aggressor," the Washington columnist Jack Anderson made sensational disclosures that revealed that the U.S. Government's anti-Indian "tilt" was solely dictated by President Nixon. The "Anderson Papers" revealed how the U.S. President was responsible for the anti-Indian bias and for

*Bharat Darshan* tour of the country from Kashmir to Kerala, and Bombay to Calcutta. It was obvious that it was one of her rare moments of relaxation. Seated in their midst on the peaceful sun-lit lawns of her house, she talked to them of things that would normally interest and amuse children, and also about the national ideals of unity and integration that the children should imbibe. But her approach was informal and friendly, something that the children could understand and appreciate and even laugh at. She asked them, for instance, whether, during their 3-weeks tour, they had tasted the dishes of every region. Then she talked of her own childhood, how at one of her schools the children had to march and parade at the orders of a retired but tough army sergeant, how in another school all of them had to get up very early to do physical exercises.

In the end she volunteered to reveal the secret of her phenomenal energy and strength that sustained her during the stress and tension before and during the days of the war. "Many people ask me," pointing to Mrs. Nandini Satpathy, her Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting who was present "even Nandiniji wants to know why I don't get tired, how I am able to do so much work in a single day. It is because, as a child, I went to schools where the discipline was very strict and they insisted on all the girls going through a rigorous physical training."

While the Indian forces, in collaboration with the *Mukti Bahini* and the active assistance of the local population of Bangla Desh who welcomed the Indian soldiers as friends and liberators, steadily cut through the Pakistani garrisons, and in less than ten days, were only forty miles from Dacca where the Pakistani forces were planning to make their last stand. Indira Gandhi, personally, had to contend with another "enemy" that none of her commanders could tackle. It was the President of the United States of America, Mr. Richard Nixon, with his army of advisors, assistants and officials, led by the redoubtable Mr. Kissinger.

The whole world knew, of course, that the U.S. military interests demanded the arming of Pakistan. But it was naively believed, both in the U.S.A. and outside, that these arms and

or development loans could be assigned to India without approval of the White House and enquired "what the next turn of the screw might be." He significantly suggested that "if we (i. e. the U.S.) had not cut the sale of arms to Pakistan, the current problem would not exist." Finally, he said, clearly on behalf of the President, "We are not trying to be even handed. There can be no doubt what the President wants. The President does not want to be even handed. The President believes that India is the attacker. We are trying to get across the idea that India has jeopardized relations with the United States." He added a cynical aside, contemptuous of the Indian Prime Minister, "'The Lady' is cold blooded and tough and will not turn into a Soviet satellite merely because of pique. We should not ease her mind."

The lady, meanwhile, had the satisfaction of knowing that Nixon and Kissinger, however hostile they might be to her and to India, and whatever power they might wield, in this case, did not represent the enlightened public opinion even in their own country.

The American press had been, on the whole, fairly reporting the origins of the conflict and the progress of the war without any overt bias for either side. Most of the newspapers agreed with the *Time* newsmagazine's assessment that :

The conflict had its genesis last March when the Pakistani President and his tough military regime (1) moved to crush the East Pakistani movement for greater autonomy, (2) outlawed the Awami League, which had just won a majority in the nation's first free election, (3) arrested its leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and (4) launched a repressive campaign that turned into a civil war with East Pakistan's Bengalis fighting to set up an independent Bangla Desh (Bengal Nation). Nearly 1,000,000 people were killed and 10 million refugees streamed into India.<sup>1,2</sup>

1. Quoted in the book "Anderson Papers—A Study of Nixon's Blackmail of India" by Vinod Gupta.

2. *Time* newsmagazine, December 13, 1971.

manoeuvres to arrange deliveries of lethal weapons to Pakistan through third countries like Turkey, Jordan and Iran. Quoting secret documents of the "Special Action Group Meeting on Indo-Pakistan Hostilities", held on 4th December, 71, and headed by Dr. Henry Kissinger, Columnist Anderson quoted from the minutes—

It was decided that the U.S. would request immediate meeting of the Security Council... The U.S. Government's U.N. approach would be tilted toward the Paks. Economic aid for Pakistan currently in effect will not be terminated....

It is significant that, while responsible U.S. officials, inspired by their President, were holding India as the "aggressor", this secret meeting of experts (including C.I.A. men) recorded that "We do not know who started the current action, nor do we know why the Paks hit the four small airfields yesterday. Dr. Kissinger requested that by Monday C.I.A. prepare an account of who did what to whom and when."

In the same meeting Dr. Kissinger stated that "he was under specific instructions from the President" and that "the President had directed that cut off (in economic aid) was to be directed at India only" and that "aid for Pakistan is not being cut off."

Kissinger also revealed that "I am getting hell every half hour from the President that we are not being tough enough on India."

At the next meeting of the Special Group, held on 11th December, 71, Dr. Kissinger (as the mouthpiece of the President) noted with visible emotion that "India might be attempting, through calculated destruction of Pak armoured and air force, to render Pakistan impotent." He requested that "the Jordanian interest in assisting Pakistan not to be turned off, but rather kept in holding pattern." Significantly, and menacingly enough, "He asked that Pak capabilities in Kashmir be assessed." He wanted C.I.A. to assess the Pak capabilities—or to use, its cloak-and-dagger methods to translate these capabilities into action, damaging to India?

Dr. Kissinger also emphasized that the President had made it clear that no further foreign exchange, PL-480 commodities,



the aim was to evacuate American nationals in Bangla Desh but no one uses a whole nuclear-powered Fleet for that purpose. According to John Andersen, writing in *Washington Post*, there were four main reasons: "(1) to compel India to divert both ships and planes to shadow the task force, (2) to weaken India's blockade of East Bengal ports, (3) to divert the Indian aircraft carrier *Vikrant* from its military mission, and (4) to force India to keep planes on defence alert, thus reducing their offensive operations against Pakistani ground forces."<sup>1</sup>

The Seventh Fleet came, to say the least, to divert the Indian Navy—possibly to intervene in East Bengal and to try to evacuate the doomed men of General Niazi. The aim might also have been to frighten India—and the Indian leaders—into slackening the pace of the Indian advance to Dacca. Another theory was that the U.S. motive was to establish a beach-head for landing the marines on the Bangla Desh coast. The Indian Ambassador to the U.S., Laxmi Kant Jha, made this allegation publicly in Washington on December 14, 1971. The State Department denied it.<sup>2</sup>

A lesser leader than Indira Gandhi would have been provoked to take some desperate or precipitate action—which is, perhaps, what the Americans wanted. But Indira Gandhi decided to ignore the Seventh Fleet, and not to be intimidated by its presence. The formidable might of the U.S. Navy had no terrors for this lady who was "cold-blooded and tough", as Henry Kissinger ventured to describe her.

Indira Gandhi knew what Mr. Nixon and Mr. Kissinger, with all their world-wide C.I.A. network of agents, did not know, or would not care to admit even to themselves, that it was all over with Pakistan armed might in Bangla Desh. Dacca was now within the range of Indian artillery, and even the Governor's House was not immune to India's air attacks. The countdown for the Dacca garrison had begun.

Moreover, the American fleet was not all alone in the Indian Ocean. Close on its heels was another fleet—the Soviet battle

1. Quoted in *Anderson Papers—A Study of Nixon's Blackmail of India*, by Vinod Gupta.

2. *Ibid.*

Liberal American public opinion was voiced by Senator Edward Kennedy who declared that the Administration had turned a deaf ear for eight months to "the brutal and systematic repression of East Bengal by the Pakistani army" and was now condemning "the response of India toward an increasingly desperate situation on its Eastern borders." Senators Hubert Humphrey and Edmund Muskie expressed similarly strong sentiments.

John P. Lewis, one time U.S.A.I.D. director in India and now dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton, wrote: "We have managed to align ourselves with the wrong side of about as big and simple a moral issue as the world has seen lately, and we have sided with a minor military dictatorship against the world's second largest nation."

As usual, a cartoonist summed up the situation better, and more effectively, than any speech or statement. Haynie of *Louisville Courier-Journal* depicted a puny Nixon holding up an over-sized picture of a Sikh soldier defensively carrying a stengun. This picture, obviously painted by artist Nixon, is labeled INDIA, THE WARMONGER, while just, on the other side of Nixon's averted face, a child named E. Pakistan is being stabbed by a grinning bully carrying the flag of Pakistan! Just above a reproduction of this cartoon, *Time* newsmagazine flashed a double column headline: THE U.S. : A POLICY IN SHAMBLES.

The next attempted "turn of the screw" (as Henry Kissinger wanted to know on the 8th of December) was the despatch of the U.S. Seventh Fleet to the Bay of Bengal the very next day. This decision was taken by President Nixon himself on December 9, 1971 and the same day the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier *Enterprise* moved out from the Bay of Tonkin. On the 10th December, the entire Seventh Fleet, led by the *Enterprise*, sailed from the Malacca Straits towards the Bay of Bengal. It remained in the Bay up to the 20th and moved away, only after the Americans knew that all was over with Pakistani power in Bangla Desh.

What could be the motives for the despatch of the Seventh Fleet to the Bay of Bengal? It was stated in Washington that

Minister, was in Bombay." She added with bitter irony, "Could we simply sit back trusting that the rulers of Pakistan, or those who were advising them, had peaceful, constructive and reasonable intent?"

Why did she send this letter as late as December 15, 1971, when she knew that the fall of Dacca was imminent, and that the cause of Bangla Desh freedom, which she had made her own, was going to triumph in a matter of hours, despite the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the situation by the American President and his spokesmen? The reason could only be that, even at that late hour, she wanted to set the record straight, and make an appeal to the conscience of the American people, and the peoples of the world. The 'open letter' addressed to the President of the United States provided a convenient and effective forum for her to reach the maximum international audience to prepare it to take the news of the liberation of Bangla Desh in its correct historical perspective.

*December 16, 1971.*

It was one of the coldest days in New Delhi, and the Prime Minister got up when it was still dark, for a thick pall of mist lay over the sprawling city.

She enjoyed her steaming cup of coffee at breakfast, and as she read the daily newspaper, they only confirmed what she already knew from intelligence reports, monitoring of radio broadcasts and despatches received directly from the Commanders at the different fronts.

"Stop fighting and surrender". She liked the crisp, curt and businesslike words in which General Manekshaw had advised the Pak General Niazi in Dacca, who was pleading for a Cease-fire. She smiled at the irony of it, for the appeal had been sent to India—*via* the American Embassy!

The Seventh Fleet of the U.S.A., led by the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, *Enterprise*, was heading for the Bay of Bengal.

An armada of twenty Soviet warships, including missile cruisers and destroyers, were trailing the American Seventh Fleet, and were also headed for the Bay of Bengal.

The Indian Air Force had ceased attacks on military targets in Dacca at 5 p.m. on 15th, to give time to the Pakistani forces

ships were trailing the Americans. The news, when published by the Indian newspapers, was hailed with relief and joy by the entire Indian people. They knew now the wisdom of their Prime Minister in signing the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship. India was still non-aligned but not friendless. If America, on behalf of Pakistan, was threatening India with its long-discredited Gunboat Diplomacy, there were other Gunboats, too, that could make their presence felt, on behalf of India. The threat and the equally effective counter-threat were both silently-staged episodes in a game of International Dumb Charade. Eventually both the fleets would discreetly retire to their original positions, without firing a single shot. But the world knew, and India rejoiced, that for once the bluff of the mighty U.S. Navy had been called !

Meanwhile, in other international forums, the Prime Minister of India was trading words with the President of United States. When Nixon called on India to halt its "armed attack" and suggested another meeting of the U.N. Security Council, a White House spokesman elaborated that the President considered the Indian "occupation of East Pakistan as an attack on the very existence of a member state of United Nations." Indira Gandhi, in her forthright reply, held the U.S. responsible for the military adventurism of Pakistan. In a personal letter addressed directly to President Nixon, Indira Gandhi, "setting aside all pride, prejudice and passion and trying as calmly as I can," reminded him that the struggle of the Bangla Desh people *for freedom was in keeping with the Declaration of Independence* by the United States of America which had "stated that wherever any form of government became destructive of man's inalienable right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, it is the right of the people to alter it or to abolish it."

Relating the tragic sequence of events which led to the hostilities she said, "We would still have tried our hardest to restrain the mounting pressure as we had for nine long months, and war could have been prevented, had the rulers of Pakistan not launched a massive attack on us by bombing our airfields... at a time when I was in Calcutta, my colleague, the Defence Minister, was in Patna and was to leave further for Bangalore in the South, and another senior colleague of mine, the Finance

into a veritable studio set, when she heard a buzzer on her Secraphone. Lifting the receiver, she heard the message, acknowledged it with a laconic "Good!", then replaced the instrument. She turned to the TV people, "Gentlemen, will you excuse me for a few minutes? I have an announcement to make in Parliament." Then she walked down the corridor which leads straight to her seat in the Lok Sabha, without the Swedes knowing anything about the importance of the occasion.

True to the traditions of Democracy, the first persons to get the news would be the elected representatives of the people. The members of Parliament had been expecting it, waiting for it, waiting for it, since morning. When Indira Gandhi stood up in her seat and began making her statement, there was a tense, expectant silence. She said, "I have an announcement to make. The West Pakistan forces have unconditionally surrendered in Bangla Desh," and a joyous pandemonium broke loose and the members gave a standing ovation to the Prime Minister for several minutes.

She gave the time of the signing of the instrument of surrender by General Niazi, on behalf of the West Pakistan forces, as 16.31 hours I.S.T. and added that Lt. General Jagjit Singh Aurora accepted the surrender. When she made the historic pronouncement, "Dacca is now the free capital of a free country," again there was a tremendous burst of applause.

This statement deserves to be preserved as a historic document—like the Declarations of American Independence drafted by Jefferson, or the Independence Pledge of 1931 that bore the stamp of the genius and the vision of Jawaharlal Nehru. Restraint and magnanimity marked every sentence of this declaration of Victory. The priority was given to the political, ideological, and humanitarian objectives that had been achieved through speedy and successful military action. "We hail the people of Bangla Desh in their hour of triumph. We hail the brave young men and boys of the *Mukti Bahini* for their valour and dedication." Only then she said that "We are proud of our own Army, Navy, Air Force and the Border Security Force, who have so magnificently demonstrated their quality and capacity."

"Our objectives were limited," she added, "—to assist the gallant people of Bangla Desh and their *Mukti Bahini* to

to surrender by 9 A.M. on the 16th December.

This, then, was *the day*! She thought to herself without any visible emotion, as she came out to meet the people who had braved the morning chill to bring their complaints and their suggestions, their congratulations and their grateful thanks, personally to their Prime Minister. She wouldn't give up this routine, which brought her in contact with her people, even on a day like this.

Would the news that she awaited be on her desk as she arrived in her office at Parliament House for an informal meeting of the Political Affairs Committee consisting of her senior Cabinet colleagues?

She waited for it during the meeting and afterwards, while looking through the files, and conversing with two of her senior Secretaries—P.N. Dhar, the economist, and Sharada Prasad, the Director of Information.

She was still waiting when the Education Minister came to see her, as also when she granted interviews to several M.P.'s. Several of them enquired if she had received the good news, but she replied with her characteristic smile and said, "It will come!" She was as confident of it as, earlier, she was confident that the Bangla Desh refugees "would go back"—and, already, they had started trekking back to the liberated areas!

She was still waiting when she went for a brief period to the Lok Sabha, and everyone rushed to the Chamber, expecting the big news of final surrender. But she could only report that a Pakistani Major General had surrendered along with his troops when the Indian army entered Dacca this morning. But the documents of surrender had not yet been signed.

She lunched sparsely, and then her principal private secretary came to ask if she would go through with the interview she had promised to a Swedish TV team. The time fixed was at 3-15 p.m., and she had half a mind to postpone it, for the message she had been waiting for might come at any moment. Then she re-asserted her resolve to be as calm and normal as possible, even while expecting momentous events. And she said, "Why not? Send them in!"

The TV lights, cameras, microphones and cables were all over her spacious office which had been turned momentarily

*Mukti Bahini* could not have fought so daringly but for its passionate urge for freedom and the establishment of a special identity of Bangla Desh. Our own forces could not have been so fearless and relentless, had they not been convinced of their cause." Her historic contribution was to galvanize and reinforce the dynamic ideals and the fighting spirit that combined to bring victory of India.

During those two hectic days, December 16 and 17, the Members of Parliament—not only her own Party members but also members and leaders of the Opposition parties—vied with each other in showering encomiums upon her for her courage and statesmanship in steering the country safely during the crisis. Forgotten were the old acrimonious accusations that she was too timid and lacked dynamism. In that moment she was no longer merely the leader of the ruling, majority party. The elected representatives of the people acknowledged her as the leader of the nation.

Shamim Ahmed Shamim, the volatile independent Member of Parliament from Kashmir paid her an eloquent and gallant tribute. "Our Prime Minister has not only made history. She has also made geography."

Certainly she had done more than any other non-Bengali to make the emergence of free Bangla Desh possible, as a new country on the map of the world.

The most touching climax of this period of Indira Gandhi's career came, twenty days later, when she stood up at a mass meeting in Delhi to welcome Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, released two days earlier from his prison in Pakistan, and now flying to be re-united with his family, his colleagues and comrades, his entire people, on the soil of free Bangla Desh. In the course of this speech, she said that :

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had given a pledge to his people that he would make them free and create opportunities for building a new life. He has fulfilled both pledges. His body might have been imprisoned, but none could imprison his spirit. He inspired the people of Bangla Desh to fight, and today he is free.

She also summed up the role that India had played in this

liberate their country from a reign of terror and to resist aggression on our land. Indian Armed Forces will not remain in Bangla Desh any longer than necessary."

She made a touching reference to the Bangla leader who, for the last ten months had been languishing in a West Pakistani prison :

"We hope and trust that the Father of this new nation, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, will take his rightful place among his own people and lead Bangla Desh to peace, progress and prosperity. The time has come when they together look forward to a meaningful future in their Sonar Bangla."

But, she ended, lifting her statement out of the purely military context to the heights of statesmanship, "The triumph is not theirs alone. All nations who value the human spirit will recognize it as a significant milestone in man's quest for liberty."

A few hours later, she raised her international stature higher (though she displeased many communalists and jingoists in her own country) by declaring a unilateral cease-fire on the Western front also, and appealing directly to the Pakistani people. "We want to assure them that we have no enmity towards them. There are more things in common than those which divide us." This time, the re-statement of India's peaceful intentions carried more weight, because it was backed by a decisive military victory.

The liberation of Bangla Desh was a resounding vindication of the policies and strategies of Indira Gandhi. On that day, she became a statesman of the world class. Under her over-all direction, the armed forces of India erased the shame of the disaster of 1962 when the Chinese had over-run parts of Assam. The fourteen-day war with Pakistan, which ended in a resounding victory for India, concluded the "unfinished story" that had been interrupted by the Cease-fire and the Tashkent Pact of 1965.

It is a strange paradox that a supposedly frail woman had been destined to give India the first complete military victory in the long story of wars of aggression on Indian soil. But, as she told the Lok Sabha a day after the liberation of Dacca, "It is a victory, but a victory not only of arms but of ideals. The



## The Road To Simla

*Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that defences of peace must be constructed.*

—CONSTITUTION OF UNESCO

*Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding.*

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

WITHIN LESS THAN TWO WEEKS OF THE PAKISTANI SURRENDER AT Dacca, Indira Gandhi talked to an American correspondent in New Delhi about the prospects of peace between India and Pakistan. He found her "relaxed, smiling shyly, though looking slightly wan...spontaneous but totally free from war-time rhetoric."<sup>1</sup>

Some Opposition leaders who wanted the war in the West to be pursued despite the surrender in Dacca were opposed to the unilateral Cease-fire, and they plumped for the story put out by certain American newspapers suggesting that Indira Gandhi was pressurized into the Cease-fire by the Soviets who, in turn, were being pressurized by the Americans. When asked

1. Interview with William Stewart of *TIME* newsmagazine, on December 28, 1971. The Prime Minister was not quoted verbatim, and her words were abridged and edited by the journal.

historic development :

We in India also gave three pledges to our people. The first was that those refugees who had come here would go back. The second was that we would give every kind of help to the people of Bangla Desh and to the *Mukti Bahini*. The third was that we shall secure the release of Sheikh Mujib. We, too, have been able to fulfil these pledges.

In reply, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman not only expressed gratitude to the Indian people but paid the highest compliment that one Head of a State could pay to another :

For me, this is the most gratifying moment. I decided to stop over in the historical capital of your great country on my way to Bangla Desh, for this is the least I could do to pay my personal tribute to the best friends of my people, the people of India, and to your Government under the leadership of your magnificent Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who is not only a leader of men but also of mankind.

This gallant remark might have been inspired by a moment of intense emotion, as he saw, standing by his side, the one person to whom, more than any one else, he owed his release from captivity and, perhaps, his very life, and certainly the liberation of his people.

But there is no doubt that her popularity and her political stature at the end of the war had assumed towering proportions. From a constitutional Prime Minister, she had suddenly become a symbol and a legend in her own life-time.

sense of injury to respond to a goodwill gesture from the other side.

India and Pakistan are strangely alienated countries—in twentyfive years they have had two regular wars, dozens of border troubles, and a running battle of heated polemics, and yet once they have overcome initial hesitations and self-consciousness, at no time has there been any difficulty about talking to each other. Five thousand years of shared history and cultural and linguistic synthesis cannot be altogether un-done in a quarter century of separation. But for Bhutto to be actually, able to "face up to realities" and for people in Pakistan to "calm down", it took longer than even Indira Gandhi, the cautious optimist, was able to anticipate at the end of 1971.

But a hopeful portent of the future was the release of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from a condemned cell in a West Panjab jail by the new President of Pakistan. Then came the secret flight of the celebrated prisoner to London, the tumultuous welcome accorded to him during a brief stop-over in Delhi, and his moving meeting with Indira Gandhi, the one person who, more than any one else, had made the speedy success of the struggle for liberation possible. The same day he was in Dacca, and with the re-union of the Leader and the People, the Bangla Desh revolution was complete. Indira Gandhi could now devote her whole attention to solving the problems of her own country.

She gave an insight into her mind in the end-of-the-year press conference that she addressed on the last day of the year, in the course of which she was asked about many national and international issues.

The date for the elections to the State Assemblies in March next year had been announced, and she was asked if the Government was not holding them too soon. It might be regarded as a "khaki election", and her party might sweep the polls on the crest of national victory in the war, and to that extent weaken democracy. It was also stated that she had become a "national rallying point" which could have been utilised, for a period at least, to channel the nation's energies for constructive purposes.

She began her reply with an ironic statement. "It is a

about this theory, the Prime Minister emphatically replied. "The decision was made right here (i.e. in that very room—KAA) at the moment of surrender in Dacca. We were able to inform the Soviet Union right away only because Mr. Kuznetsov happened to be here." Then she added spiritedly, addressing President Nixon by proxy. "I am not a person to be pressured—by any body or any nation."

On Moscow's supposed influence on India's decision-making, she was forthright. "We are friends; we have always been friends. The Soviet Union recognized certain attitudes in Asia, such as racialism and colonialism. But Russia will not affect our decision-making. We will not be party to any bloc."

It was in this interview that she said that "a stable Pakistan is in India's interests and we want a normal, friendly and enduring relations with the new government (of President Bhutto who had replaced the discredited Yahya Khan). We do not insist that Islamabad recognise the new regime in Dacca. After all, Bangla Desh is a reality; anything else is between Bangla Desh and Pakistan. But Pakistan must overcome her negative attitude towards India."

On the same day, another American correspondent asked her, "Do you believe that normal relations can be established with Pakistan?" Indira Gandhi replied, "I believe normal relations can come, and will come, if outside countries do not interfere." The correspondent further asked if she expected any "difficulties in getting negotiations going between India and Pakistan," and she replied, "There is no difficulty at all. The negotiations can start as soon as Pakistan is in a mood to do so. Obviously, it is a difficult time for them now, but as soon as they are willing to face up to realities there should be no problem. But I think they have to have time. Mr. Bhutto has just come back. Everybody needs to have time to calm down."

She had correctly anticipated Bhutto's difficulties—there were revanchists in Pakistan as there were chauvinists in India. Moreover, if it was embarrassing for the victor to start talking to the self-conscious vanquished, it was doubly difficult for the defeated party to overcome national humiliation and the raw

1. Interview with Edward Behr of *Newsweek*, December 28, 1971.

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funny way of strengthening democracy by not having elections." Then she reminded the Press that the elections should have been held in February and had been delayed by a month as preparations for them could not be made while the nation was at war. She had a dig at the Opposition parties when she replied to the second point raised. "The other statement you made is equally astonishing, which is if you have elections, the Opposition parties will not help in economic programmes. I think that is a very sad commentary on them..."

One of the reporters present paid her a compliment by saying "The year 1971 has proved a lucky year to the country under the great leadership of Mrs. Gandhi" and asked "how should we celebrate 1972 tonight so that it may bring more luck and prosperity?"

The Prime Minister was not to be taken in by flattery. "Firstly, I do not believe in luck. Luck comes to those who have the character to bold it. It is not something that, by chance, flutters in through the window. You have to work jolly hard. I think that the best New Year resolution that you can make is that everybody should work hard to create the type of India which we all want."

She continued this theme when she spoke, three days later, at a mammoth public meeting held in Delhi at the Ram Lila grounds.

Alluding to the strong and bitterly cold westerly winds under an overcast sky, she said, "We should not allow ourselves to be carried away by whatever wind blows from the West. We have to attain intellectual self-dependence no less than economic self-reliance."

In the first flush of victory, many in India had begun to say that now India was one of the Big Powers, and other Big Powers had to contend with this reality. There was also talk of the balance of power in Asia having tilted in India's favour because of India's military victory. They were thus unwittingly playing the game of those who were no friends of India, and who were saying that, having defeated Pakistan, India was now assuming the posture of a Big Power. On this point, Indira Gandhi spoke what Gandhi and Nehru would have liked her to say, "Some people say that India is aspiring

to become a Big Power. Some people have coined this phrase, but they must know that the concept of 'Big Power' has become an anachronism in the present day world. We don't want to become a 'Big Power'. What we want is to live peacefully with all the countries, and a feeling of equality among all the nations—however big or small."

In the felicitation address presented earlier, and in some of the songs sung on this occasion, fulsome and flattering encomiums had been showered on her, she had been compared to Lord Rama who had defeated the demon Ravana in battle, but she would not countenance such flattery. She set the record straight with characteristic modesty—both personal and national. "The credit of winning the war is being attributed to me which is not right. This work (the liberation of Bangla Desh) had been accomplished not by me but by the people—men, women, old and young—of Bangla Desh. We only rendered them the help that we were capable of." That, she instinctively knew, was the time when such flattery might go to her head, and it had to be discouraged and scotched precisely at that very moment.

Instead of taking undue credit for herself, she recounted the episodes illustrating the high morale and heroism of ordinary people in the border areas, including the story of how a housewife, with great presence of mind, cleverly disarmed a Pakistani saboteur and overpowered him, raising an alarm, which attracted the other villagers and an Indian army patrol.

Talking about the forthcoming elections to the State legislatures, and the Congress election manifesto that had just been issued, she indicated the historic responsibility of the Indian voters: "If economic freedom and opportunity for all is to become real for our masses...we need governments which are strong, stable and committed to the secular Socialist vision in every state, to implement and complement the efforts of a strong, stable, secular, Socialist Government at the Centre."

The Congress party's election manifesto, apart from other things, contained the clearest summing-up of Indira Gandhi's Bangla Desh strategy and timing:

Every Government and people are tested in times of crisis and more severely in times of war.

The world knows now that the broad strategy adopted, inspired by wisdom and deep understanding of the great issues involved, achieved success. The combination of patience and decisiveness and the timing of every key move have been widely acclaimed. No step was taken a day too soon or too late. The highest degree of statesmanship was required to withstand and frustrate international and domestic pressures and to disprove the propaganda that India had any expansionist designs. Any precipitate actions would not only have led to greater complications but also have damaged the country's high reputation as a champion of freedom, justice and peace.... The world today acknowledges that Bangla Desh is a reality. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of that Nation, has returned to his people. The refugees are returning to their homes. We can now turn, once again, to our principal concern, namely, the tasks which the Congress had set out in its Election Manifesto of 1971.

The new Manifesto referred to the pledges to the electorate already redeemed—the three Constitutional amendments restoring the power of the Parliament to amend any part of the Constitution in the interests of the common people, the abolition of privy purses and princely privileges, the take-over of General Insurance in addition to the already nationalised Life Insurance and of the coking coal mines. It justifiably celebrated the fact that “the production of foodgrains reaching 108 million tonnes has enabled us to stop the import of cereals.”

While Bhutto was striving to “win friends and influence people” of Turkey, Libya, Algeria, and eventually making the routine pilgrimage to Peking, in a vain attempt to avoid the historical necessity of coming to an understanding with India, Indira Gandhi was embarking on yet another whirlwind tour of the country. The main theme of her speeches was the need of strong and stable governments in States, willing to cooperate with the Centre in the onward march towards Socialism and all-round progress. While frankly admitting that the Government had not yet been able to fulfil all the promises it had made to the people, she emphasized that it had definitely taken certain decisive steps in that direction. A typical



remark which she repeated often, always evoked popular applause: "We met unprecedented challenges last year and now we have to accelerate the pace of economic development so that even the weakest and poorest sections of the society can enjoy its fruits." On other occasions, as in Delhi, she conceded that "we as a nation have many weaknesses, and the Congress has sometimes made mistakes. But our endeavour has always been to remove them."

By talking frankly with the people, she was using her election campaign—a school for socialist education—as an occasion for deepening the awareness of the people of the issues at stake. In the course of a last-minute personal letter to the voters, Indira Gandhi wrote words that could not but evoke a warm response from the people:

We have kept our promises to help the freedom of Bangla Desh and to secure the return of ten million refugees to their homes in honour and safety.

Now we must turn again to the bigger war—the war against poverty—and win it with the same unity and determination.

The people and administration must work together. Don't be a spectator. Join as an active participant.

The election campaign, and eventually the election itself, was the world's most stupendous exercise in democracy. But this time there was a little difference in the strategy of the Congress Party. As the *Socialist Congressman*<sup>1</sup> editorially put it, "the Congress has come to an understanding with a number of other radical and progressive parties, notably the Communist Party, and what remains of the Praja Socialist Party, in some of the states." But these "sensible adjustments" (made at the discretion and on the authority of Indira Gandhi) "led to some ostentatious raising of the eyebrows in quarters which last year were able to take the Grand Alliance in their stride and even pronounced benediction on it." The journal expressed surprise that "even some Congressmen" had been puzzled by it, for it was not the first time that the Congress had come to electoral arrangements with parties which were like-minded and

1. The official organ of the All India Congress Committee.

broadly accept (or, in their thinking, are ahead of) the radical programme of the Congress. It reminded the Congressmen that "after all, the Congressman is an active partner in the ruling coalition in Kerala with the Communists and the others" and the experiment has been working satisfactorily. "Both the reactionary parties on the Right and extremists on the Left have never been able to win on their own strength even in areas where they are relatively well entrenched. They have won only because of the division of the democratic vote. Such easy victories ought to be denied to them."

There was also a long-term purpose of these adjustments with these like-minded leftist parties—a sort of counter—"Grand Alliance"! Its success would mean substantial enlargement and strengthening of the consensus for Socialism in the country—instead of the Consensus for Capitalism, for which S.K. Patil, Morarji and Company had been working for years within the Congress! By seeking to mobilize and integrate with the Congress all the reserves of Socialist and radical opinion behind its programme, Indira Gandhi displayed great political tact and wisdom—and courage, too, for she was laying herself open to the charge of colluding with the Communists!

Her other electoral strategy was to choose as Congress candidates comparatively younger and more dynamic elements, as also representatives of the weaker sections of the community—the minorities, the Scheduled Castes, the Tribals. But, above all, the accent, especially in Bengal, was on youth. And Bengal registered the most spectacular victory.

The results of the State elections, which once again gave a massive mandate to the Congress, proved the wisdom and efficacy of Indira Gandhi's political and electoral strategy. The voters rejected both Right Reaction of the Syndicate, the Jana Sangh, and the Swatantra, and the Left Adventurism of the Marxist Communists who were roundly trounced even in their stronghold of West Bengal. After a long time, this all-important and strategic state gave an overwhelming majority to the Congress Party. Out of eighteen states and union territories that went to the polls, all except three small and politically backward Union territories returned Congress Governments with substantial (if not overwhelming) majorities. Even more

than the Parliamentary elections of 1971, this was a triumph for Indira Gandhi. Even the daily *Motherland* of New Delhi, the organ of Jana Sangh opinion, was obliged to admit: "If there was an Indira wave in 1971, there is an Indira tide in 1972. In State after State, the ruling party has swept to power with such force that not many of them may have big enough opposition fronts to be officially recognized as such...."

Yet, at the first opportunity Indira Gandhi publicly disclaimed any personal glory. "Whatever victory we have gained is due to the people of India", she said while responding to the laudatory speeches at the Congress Parliamentary Party meeting at Delhi on March 13. This was not false modesty, for in the same speech she also delivered her well-considered thoughts on leadership which must have caused some perplexity among the several hundred small and big "leaders" present on the occasion :

As you know, I am not one of those who believe in leadership. My whole attempt is how to create a society in which people do not need a leader. I do not mean, you do not need a Prime Minister. But, in this country, we still have a very dependent attitude in every section. They are looking towards somebody to do something, somebody to show the way, whether it is in our party, whether it is even in other parties.... Now we must attempt a far more self-reliant attitude of mind amongst our people, specially among the younger people.

Within a week of the State elections, Indira Gandhi went to Dacca to sign a 25-year treaty with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Based on Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace and Friendship, the Indo-Bangla Desh "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace" binds the two sovereign countries to "strengthen and widen their mutually advantageous and all-round cooperation in the economic, scientific and technical fields...on the basis of the principles of equality, mutual benefit and the most favoured national principle."

Having consolidated Indo-Bangla Desh friendship, and fortified with the installation of politically-harmonious governments in the State capitals, Indira Gandhi was now free to

revive efforts to establish enduring peace in the sub continent. She had already, even before the elections, taken the initiative by publicly stating that she was willing for talks with Mr. Bhutto "without any pre-conditions". Bhutto revealed on March 30 that the views of Indian Prime Minister had been communicated to Pakistan through USSR and Ceylon. The President had sent a message suggesting a Summit meeting to which Indira Gandhi replied that while she had no objection to a meeting at the Summit, in her view it would be better if there was a preliminary meeting between officials at a lower level to prepare the agenda and other details of the Summit.

I had a long interview with her in the middle of April in which she had hit hard at Nixon's renewal of Vietnam bombing. "The bombing in Vietnam is deplorable," she said, adding "It is a deplorable state of affairs, especially when all indications were that the war was coming to an end, and that the American forces were going to withdraw." Further escalation, she said, constituted "a danger to the peace of the whole world." Then she paid a striking tribute to "the indomitable spirit of the Vietnamese who have courageously held out against such a mighty force for so many years." India could help the brave Vietnamese by rousing the conscience of the world.

She also significantly referred to the international intrigues "to drive a wedge between India and Bangla Desh" and when, asked to identify these elements, she replied that "they are the very people who did not want to recognise the reality of the Bangla Desh situation."

Gone from her face were the signs of tension and anxiety which had appeared during the days of the Bangla Desh crisis. She had a healthy glow on her smiling face as she talked to me in her office for a whole hour-and-a-half, surveying the national and international scene. The victory in the war with Pakistan and the equally resounding victory in the battle of the ballot, had certainly given her not only a new stature but also an air of optimistic assurance as she spoke with enthusiasm of the "tremendous potential" of the Indian people.

At the very start of this interview I had ventured to say to her: "Let us start with Mr. Bhutto. I feel that in any peace

talks after a war, there is bound to be considerable embarrassment on both sides. This embarrassment inhibits a meaningful dialogue. Are you hopeful about a Summit meeting with Mr. Bhutto in the near future?"

She replied promptly and without any hesitation or reservation. "A meaningful dialogue is possible. Not only is it possible, but also, I think it is very necessary in the present circumstances for both the countries."

Then she elaborated that she herself had taken the initiative and how careful preparations have to be made prior to the Summit meeting. "The reason is," she explained, "that if you meet at the Summit and it does not succeed, there is nowhere you can go from there. If you have a meeting at a lesser level and then you decide how the Summit will proceed, it is helpful." She revealed that "Mr. Bhutto had agreed to this"—now it was only a question of deciding the time and the details.

Evidently these details, too, were quickly worked out, for before the month of April was out, the Prime Minister had sent D.P. Dhar to Islamabad. A former Ambassador to Moscow and then Chairman of the Policy Planning Committee in the Ministry of External Affairs (now Union Minister for Planning), Dhar was sometimes referred to by a section of the Press as "India's Kissinger". He is not a Professor but he has some of the qualities of Kissinger, though he does not share the fascination for the kind of ostentatious secrecy with which the latter loves to conduct his diplomacy. Urbane, sophisticated, well-read, soft-spoken, Dhar is a diplomat *par excellence*, and one of the ablest negotiators we have for any such delicate mission. He was the principal negotiator of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship. In dealing with Pakistan, he could summon not only his intimate knowledge of most of the Pakistani politicians, men of letters and prominent Civil Servants, but also his prodigious memory so that he could quote the appropriate verses of the classical and modern Urdu poets from memory to suit any occasion. During what are known as Murree Talks, he had to use all his persuasive tact in his negotiations with the intransigent hard-liner Aziz Ahmed, Bhutto's Foreign Secretary.

At one stage the talks had virtually failed when the resource-

ful Dhar decided to go over the head of Aziz Ahmed to the Pakistan President himself. He did this in order to fulfil Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's mandate which was to forge a new basis for Indo-Pak relations. In place of confrontation, co-operation; in place of suspicion and hostility, sincere effort to build bridges of understanding and friendship. Indira Gandhi's conception of a new relationship arose not from a vague sentimentality : it was rooted in a mature and statesmanlike vision comprehending the totality of interests of millions of people in the two countries. It was Dhar's task to interpret this new philosophy of bilateralism.

In his talks with Bhutto, Dhar persevered to lift the level of negotiations from the process of bargaining to that of a long-term political perspective of a peaceful sub-continent devoting its tremendous human and material resources to the task of improving the living standards of millions of its poverty-stricken inhabitants. He could not have achieved the success he did with Bhutto if he had merely sought to take advantage of the internal pressures that were compelling Bhutto to bring back the prisoners-of-war and to retrieve the lost territory of Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> There was a certain grandeur of conception in the new basis of friendly relationship between India and Pakistan that he, on behalf of his Prime Minister, outlined to Bhutto. Bhutto responded, notwithstanding his aggressive postures in public, because he knew more than any one else that a military disengagement in the sub-continent was essential to enable the political process to come into its own in Pakistan.

Ultimately Bhutto vetoed the objections of Aziz Ahmed and made it possible for a joint communique to be issued to the effect that the emissaries had discussed "several matters including, in particular, those bearing on all aspects of durable peace in the sub-continent," thus paving the way to the Summit meeting between the President of Pakistan and the Prime Minister of India.

Before departing from Islamabad, on his journey back to

1. 3,600 square k m. of West Pakistani territory was under Indian occupation as against 126 square k.m. of Indian territory under Pakistan occupation.

Delhi, D. P. Dhar was asked at the Rawalpindi airport a message, and he quoted from a poem by Faiz Ahmed Faiz entitled *Dua* (Prayer) :

*Aiye haath uthaen mil kar  
Hum jinhen rasm-e-dua yaad naheen  
Hum jinhen soz-e-muhabbat ke siwa  
Koi but, koi khuda yaad naheen  
Aiye arz guzaren ke gunah-e-hasti  
Zehr-e-Imroze men shirini-ye farda bharde....*

("We for whom prayer is a custom forgotten  
We who, except for love's flame,  
Know neither idol nor God  
Come, let us too lift our hands,  
Make our petition that life, our love mistress,  
Smooth today's venom with sweets of  
tomorrow—")<sup>1</sup>

Indira Gandhi and Bhutto had started on the road to Simla Summit, with the prayers of at least the well-meaning people of both countries, but before they would eventually reach there, each of them still had "many miles to go". Bhutto would have to sort out the provincial problems of Sind, Baluchistan and the NWFP, and to convince the hawks in his country—specially Tikka Khao—that peaceful negotiations were not only inevitable but were ultimately in Pakistan's interests. Indira Gandhi on her part, would start a dialogue—both directly and through emissaries—with Sheikh Abdullah to make a breakthrough towards reconciliation.

She would also have to travel to Sweden to address the U.N. Environment Conference where she made an important contribution to the discussions by highlighting the problem from the point of view of non-developed and under-developed countries. She said, in effect, that without removing poverty and disparities between nations there could not be a clean environment. It was on her initiative that the Conference recommended to the U.N. General Assembly that all testing and use of weapons of mass

1. Victor Kiernan's translation of Poems by Faiz; Allen & Unwin, London.

destruction, including chemical and biological weapons, should be banned.

She pin-pointed war and poverty as the two greatest sources of pollution. She said, "The most urgent and basic problem is that of peace...What ecological project can survive a war?" And the "third" world of poor, long-exploited and therefore underdeveloped nations found a voice when she declared that "the environment cannot be improved in conditions of poverty, nor can poverty be eradicated without the use of Science and technology" which, in their turn, could be introduced only when the world was rid of war and exploitation.

Her enlightened and illuminating speech, at its conclusion, received a standing ovation by representatives of a hundred nations, significantly including even China.

From Stockholm she over-flew the territory of G.D.R., exchanging radioed greetings with Premier Willi Stoph, to reach Prague and then Budapest. The journey to Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the first undertaken by Mrs. Gandhi after the liberation of Bangla Desh was described in a Press despatch as "India's victory parade in friendly Socialist part of Europe." She took the opportunity to exchange views with the Heads of State and Government in those two countries, which were among those who had given support and understanding to India during the crucial days of the Bangla Desh liberation war. While Indira Gandhi conveyed to the leaders of the two countries India's gratitude for their goodwill and understanding, they on their part were deeply appreciative of the many progressive and radical measures that she had taken to improve the condition of the Indian people, and to reduce world tensions. As the signatory of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Indira Gandhi certainly enjoyed a new and shining image and stature in the Socialist world. She received not only cordial and correct official reception, but the common people of Czechoslovakia and Hungary turned out on the streets to give a popular and vociferous welcome to the lady from India.

On her return, she found that arrangements had been made, according to her directions, to hold the Indo-Pakistan Summit in Simla in the last days of June. There was just time enough to exchange views with her colleagues and to prepare for the



crucial conference which could bring peace and stability to the sub-continent.

It was one of the toughest and trickiest undertakings for the Prime Minister of any democracy—but it was the sort of challenge that Indira Gandhi enjoys, and that brings out the best and the bravest traits in her. The confrontation with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the mercurial, irascible, inconsistent, vocal, volatile and emotional President of Pakistan, would require the combination of the shrewdness of Chanakya and Machiavelli, the idealism and resilience of Gandhi and Nehru, the stubbornness of a Churchill, De Gaulle's single-minded pursuit of national interest and aims, and the persuasive charm and tact of a Cleopatra.

To compound her difficulties, Indira Gandhi had to be the hostess who had to keep her grandfather's tradition of hospitality, but she could not afford to forget that the man she was to talk to was the constitutional successor, though also a belated critic and denouncer, of the military dictator who had unleashed the horrible atrocities on the peace-loving people of Bangla Desh. But she also knew that the third participant of the Summit Conference—the compulsion of history—would be on her side.

Some day, somebody would write a best-seller giving the untold inside story of the Simla Summit. It would be a thriller, of course, a diplomatic whodunit, with all its dramatic twists and turns, melodramatic overtones and a few subtle under-tones. Even from the few details that are known, we can reconstruct the interesting, exciting and thrilling—suspenseful to the very end—five-act drama that was played out in Simla during those five days that changed the mood of a whole sub-continent.

The opening itself was suspenseful—and ominous. On Wednesday President Bhutto, accompanied by his daughter Benazir and a host of aides, arrived by helicopter at Anandale helipad. One can imagine the suspense, the tension and anxiety, the forebodings, on both sides. According to an eye-

witness,<sup>1</sup> as Bhutto stepped down, "The Prime Minister put out a quarter of her palm for a ceremonial handshake. They hardly talked. No smiles either." It was the crowd of pressmen who forced the two leaders into repeating a real and prolonged handshake for their cameras to properly record the historic moment.

Then, into this self consciously sombre atmosphere, intruded the compulsions of that historically-integrated Indo-Pak culture which still exists in both countries, despite all the Partitions and all the attempts of the Pakistani (and even some Indian) fanatics to disown the common Indo-Pak cultural heritage.

"*Pehlay Aap*," said the debonair and chivalrous Bhutto to the Lady, inviting the Prime Minister to precede him into the car.

"*Pehlay Aap*," said the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, who was always the soul of old-world courtesy.

The *Pehlay Aap Pehlay Aap* controversy would have gone on, but the lady who was also the host prevailed over the chivalry of the mere male, and the guest had to yield. With a how, Bhutto got into the car, followed by Indira Gandhi. The ice had been broken. Now the two would have no difficulty in talking to each other.

The Summit talks started the same evening. In her welcome speech, Indira extended to her guests, specially the President of Pakistan, a warm welcome—which, surely, must have been the first time in human history that the victor in a war had treated the Head of the defeated country with such courtesy and consideration, and scrupulously avoided any references which might have humiliated, or even embarrassed, him. She even welcomed the trend of Bhutto's broadcast of the previous night, specially his appeal to forget the past and look to the future. She referred to the world-wide trend to ease tensions between countries, an obvious allusion to Nixon's recent trips to Moscow and Peking. Finally, she expressed the hope that the talks would mark a new beginning in the relations between the two countries.

1. A. Raghavan in *Blitz* of July 8, 1972. To his exhaustive and penetrative coverage I am indebted for most of the details of the Simla Summit.

Piloo Mody, the Swatantra leader, who has known the Pakistan President since their childhood, says that Bhutto "can be magnificently responsive to the smallest gesture."<sup>1</sup> He must have been moved by the tone and temper of Indira Gandhi's speech to have reciprocated her sentiments. "Believe me," he said, "we are interested in peace. We want to turn the corner. We want to make a new beginning. We are dealing with a difficult situation with many past prejudices. We should forget the past bitterness and hostility and strive to achieve peace with honour." Strange, and strangely moving words, when we realize that they were uttered by the very man who, only a few months ago, was threatening a "thousand year war" against India!

After the opening, Indira Gandhi and Bhutto met by themselves; and then Bhutto suggested calling in a few officials from both sides. The Prime Minister suggested one from each side—she only wanted Sardar Swaran Singh, the Foreign Minister, to join them. But the President wanted two, thereby exposing the weakness of his delegation which was divided between the hawks and the doves, the older generation of conservative hard-liners and the comparatively younger liberals, with Bhutto occupying a central position.

So they were joined by Aziz Ahmed, the Secretary-General of Pakistan's Foreign Ministry, and Bhutto's own special assistant, the youthful Rafi Raza. On the Indian side, the Prime Minister was joined by Sardar Swaran Singh and P.N. Haksar, the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary. After some formal exchanges, the two Heads left the full delegations to come to grips with the agenda finalised at Murree on April 29 by D.P. Dhar and Aziz Ahmed.

The next day (Thursday June 29) both the delegations met in the morning when the Indian side presented a six-page draft of a Treaty on Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, a positive version of the No-war Pact which India had offered so many times, and Pakistan had rejected every time. This was also by way of a feeler, it would test how far the Pakistanis were prepared to go towards a permanent peace with India. But Aziz Ahmed, on behalf of his delegation, rejected the draft, even

1. *Zulfi My Friend* by Piloo Mody. (Now available in Orient Paperbacks.)

without a discussion. Calling it "an imposition", he irrelevantly said that the morale of the Pakistani people, despite the military defeat, was still very high. He also reiterated the Pakistani demand for a plebiscite in Kashmir to be guaranteed by India.

That afternoon, in some of the earliest despatches sent out by the foreign correspondents, a pessimistic picture of implacable Indo-Pak differences was given. While the Indian delegation was maintaining strict silence, "Obviously, the hawkish sections in the Pak delegation had briefed the favourite ones on India's alleged intransigence. They had an eye on the international opinion."<sup>1</sup>

But that evening, N.A. Bhatti, the suave and sweet-tongued Director-General of the Pak Foreign Ministry, gave a laconic but more optimistic and cautious account in his press briefing. He said that the progress in the talks was "slow but satisfactory" and made no allusion to the Pak delegation's rejection of the Indian draft. And so ended the second day of the Simla Summit, and the Indian correspondents could only get bitter scotch and sweet smiles from the two members of the Indian delegation—D.P. Dhar and T.N. Kaul—within their reach.

In the early hours of the next morning, D.P. Dhar suffered a minor heart-attack and had to be removed to a hospital. His absence from the negotiations was widely regretted—even in the Pakistan delegation, as D.P. had created a very favourable impression on every one, including Bhutto, during the Murree talks. But the hospitalization of D.P. Dhar provided the human angle to the political negotiations, as members of both the delegations paid courtesy calls to enquire after his welfare. Indira Gandhi, of course, was solicitous of the health of her colleague and adviser, and even President Bhutto and his daughter called at D.P.'s bed-side and offered him flowers and words of cheer.

The delegations of officials continued to meet, discuss—and agree to disagree! The only change was that the place of D.P. Dhar as the Head of the Indian official's delegation was taken by P.N. Haksar.

1. A. Raghavan in *Blitz* of July 8.

While Bhutto was spending most of his time, either seeing Indian films (the most popular of which had been flown in from Bombay) or talking to his old friend, Pilo Mody, Indira Gandhi was keeping her fingers crossed, while maintaining a close, hour-to-hour watch over the course of the negotiations.

Though the details of the discussions—and the differences—was not divulged to the press and the public, it was generally believed that there was a sharp divergence between the viewpoints of the two delegations. While India wanted a wide-ranging pact or treaty which would ensure “durable peace”, the Pakistani objectives were limited to recovery of Pakistani territory under Indian occupation, and release of the ninety thousand Pakistani prisoners of war held in Indian camps. While India wanted “restoration of stable and peaceful frontiers by converting the line of control in Kashmir into an international boundary,”<sup>1</sup> the Pakistanis wanted nothing more than the restoration of the *status quo* as it existed on December 16, 1971.

The Indian Prime Minister had made it clear that the question of prisoners of war (who had surrendered to a joint command of Indian and Bangla Desh forces) could not be decided without prior consultation with, and concurrence of, the Government of Bangla Desh. She had hoped that, before coming to Simla, Bhutto had made up his mind to recognise the reality of Bangla Desh. A little before the Summit, Bhutto had told a number of Pakistan editors that “Pakistan must recognise Bangla Desh by September or become the ‘odd man out’ at the United Nations.” At Simla, during one of their meetings, Bhutto is supposed to have indicated to Indira Gandhi that within a few months Pakistan would recognise Bangla Desh to facilitate the consideration of the release and return of prisoners of war.

On the issue of Kashmir, Pakistan wanted to keep its options open, and would not agree to the conversion of the cease-fire line into an international boundary. Indeed, this was one of the major road-blocks against which negotiations, again and again, threatened to founder.

But at a “working dinner” that Indira Gandhi gave to the

1 *Success or Surrender—The Simla Summit* by G.S. Bhargava.

two delegations, Bhutto came a little earlier and chatted with the Prime Minister. It was perhaps at this informal meeting that he "assured Mrs. Gandhi that there was no question of disturbance of the *status quo* in Kashmir and that he would gradually accept the *de facto* position. It is not inconceivable that he thus got India to be generous on the other issues."<sup>1</sup>

On the morning of Friday (June 30) when the scheduled morning session was called off, most of the Press men, specially the foreigners, concluded that the talks had failed, and some of them even started packing up their bags. But later, it appeared, the Pakistan delegation wanted time to discuss the issues raised among themselves and take instructions from their President. The delegations met together in the afternoon, and quiet, solid P.N. Haksar provoked the ire of Aziz Ahmed by emphatically pleading for the principles of the Draft Treaty including bilateralism, exclusion of third parties, including the United Nations, renunciation of force, merger of the cease-fire line in Kashmir into one single international frontier, and a final agreed solution to the Kashmir problem. There was even a hot exchange of words between T.N. Kaul, the Foreign Secretary, and Aziz Ahmed, and the session ended abruptly, giving rise again to speculation that the Summit had failed.

Indira Gandhi, meanwhile, was keeping her cool, and biding her time. Her assessment of the situation was that, whatever the hawks in his delegation might say or do, Bhutto could not afford to return empty-handed. Sure enough, that same evening, word came to Indira Gandhi, that the Pakistan President wanted to see her. She agreed to the meeting, but before that she had hurried consultations with her senior Cabinet colleagues and official advisers. It is significant of her democratic training and functioning that while she never shirks the responsibility of taking the major and even critical decisions, she always seeks the advice, and opinion, of her colleagues before finally making up her mind.

At this meeting, Bhutto is supposed to have pleaded with her to appreciate the difficulties of his position, as he had to deal with a politically *naïve* and emotionally charged nation,

1. *Ibid.*

by both sides.

Once again Aziz Ahmed gave a typically explosive performance and even called the revised draft "a step back". Haksar firmly and seriously told the Pakistan delegation that the offer to withdraw Indian troops was a generous concession made by his Prime Minister in the interests of peace in the sub-continent, and if it was to be rejected, the Summit might well be wound up. Thereupon, the Pakistani delegate expressed regret for his hasty remarks, and the discussion proceeded along on more innocuous and academic subjects like the quantum of Defence expenditure, and the relative progress of science and technology in the two countries. The youthful and liberal-minded Ali Raza pleaded for Indo-Pak exchanges in science and technology, and mentioned that in Pakistan progress is barred by Mullahs. Haksar offered the maximum Indian co-operation in this constructive field, and averred that India, too, had its own Mullahs—both Hindu and Muslim !

Despite these intellectual discussions, the hitch persisted, for whenever the topic of Kashmir and its status was touched upon, there was no meeting ground between the two delegations. And yet it appeared that some kind of breakthrough was possible.

On Sunday (July 2), the last day of the Summit, after consultations with her colleagues, Indira Gandhi sent her final offer to Bhutto. The message was sent through P.N. Haksar and T.N. Kaul who drove up to Himachal Bhawan, where Bhutto was staying, and delivered to the Pak President the Indian offer to disengage and withdraw from across the international border, and the decision to freeze the Kashmir situation along the line of actual control. They once again told Bhutto that it was a magnanimous offer by their Prime Minister, and if it was rejected the responsibility would be Bhutto's. Bhutto looked thoughtful—he had to assess the reactions in his own country—and, while conveying his thanks to the Prime Minister for her message, would not commit himself either way.

That evening, Bhutto drove up to Raj Bhawan to meet the Prime Minister and, an hour later, at his press conference, he made a significant remark that if he had not met Mrs. Gandhi a while ago, he would have said the Summit had failed. Now,

he said, "there is a glimmer of hope...for a limited agreement."

A few of the foreign correspondents had already filed their despatches, declaring the conference to be doomed to failure. For instance, the *London Times* editorial of July 2, written on the basis of the *Times* correspondent's despatches from Simla, "took it for granted that the conference had failed to achieve any positive results." The newspaper had to make amends for it on the following day with another editorial.

But, in truly filmic melodrama style of suspense, only the last ticking minutes of the Simla Summit would reveal the climax.

Till the delegations met for the dinner that Bhutto was hosting in honour of Indira Gandhi, there was pessimism in both camps. It was towards the end of the dinner that Mrs. Gandhi suggested that she and the President make one last attempt to find a solution. No one can say exactly what last-minute gesture of grace and reconciliation was made by Indira Gandhi, and what historical imperative weighed with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to agree to what he had rejected before.

It is known, however, that the point of difference was over the formulation about Jammu and Kashmir. The Pakistanis wanted to insert the clause "subject to their respective *international* positions"—the clever idea being to keep alive the pro-Pakistan U.N. directives on Kashmir alive, and to play up Pakistan's support for self-determination. At the last minute Indira Gandhi, while rejecting this demand, offered to make a small concession so that the clause would read: "The line of control (in Jammu and Kashmir) shall be respected by both sides without prejudice to the recognized position of either side." While the sands of time were running out, Bhutto decided to accept this firm and final offer.

Pilon Mody who, with his wife, was the only non-official invited by his friend Bhutto to this dinner, gives a graphic eyewitness account of the occasion:

"Very soon the atmosphere became overcharged with energy, with consultations back and forth suddenly taking place between Bhutto and his party in the Reception Room and Mrs. Gandhi and her party in the Billiard Room. The two leaders would meet, and then go back



for further consultations, and then meet again. Meanwhile, the press corps had descended on Himachal Bhavao and forced their way into the halls and living room. As this hectic activity was going on, doors leading into the Reception Room and the Billiard Room were continuously being opened and shut.

"At one moment when the door to the Billiard Room opened, it revealed an unforgettable sight. Despite a score of photographers and cameramen being present, they failed to take this immortal picture : As the door to the Billiard Room opened, we saw Jagjivan Ram sitting on the billiard table, Mrs. Gaodhi leaning over the green, frantically scratching away, obviously at the draft treaty, with Chavan and Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed poring over the table, with a host of bureaucrats surrounding them. 'It was a great shot that will have to be kept in memory !'<sup>1</sup>

Now the officials moved in, electrical typewriters were ordered to be brought in, the typists' fingers flew over the keyboards, the table was set with Indian and Pakistani decorative flags flanking each other, there were very few cameramen present as most of them had retired for the night, and at 12.40 on early Monday (July 3) morning, a document was signed by Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto that could be the precursor of peace on this long-tormented Indo-Pak sub-continent. Once again, the paradox of principled firmness and humane resilience had won the day for Indira Gandhi. And as she went to sleep that night, the soft words of Peace must be echoing in her ears —

The Government of India and the Government of Pakistan are resolved that the two countries put an end to the conflict and confrontation that have hitherto marred their relations and work for the promotion of a friendly and harmonious relationship and the establishment of durable peace in the sub-continent, so that both countries may henceforth devote their resources and energies to the pressing tasks of advancing the welfare of their people....

1. *Zulfi My Friend* by Pslou Mody.

The next day, after bidding farewell to President Bhutto at the Anandale helipad with a firm hand-shake that was much warmer than that of five days before, Indira Gandhi set down at her desk in Simla to write the long-deferred article for the American magazine *Foreign Affairs*. She wrote at a stretch, non-stop from 9 A.M. to 10-30 P.M. The article was about "India And The World" and inevitably, while surveying the history of post-freedom India's international relations, the Simla Summit was upper most in her mind. This is her own summing-up of the Summit and its background :

The shock of these events (defeat in the December war and the liberation of Bangla Desh—KAA) compelled Pakistan to exchange military dictatorship for civilian rule and opened the door to new possibilities for the peaceful resolution of the basic issues between the two countries. I took the initiative to invite President Bhutto for discussions. These have resulted in the Simla Agreement of July 2, 1972, by which Pakistan and India have proclaimed their determination to solve their conflicts bilaterally and without recourse to force, and to seek a durable peace and growing economic and cultural co-operation. The agreement, which holds the promise of settlement of the Kashmir and boundary problems, has been welcomed by almost all sections of the Indian people. It is my hope that the implementation of this agreement in the spirit in which it was made will close the 25-year-old period of Pakistan's hatred of India, and that both countries will become good neighbours. I appreciate the courage and realistic approach which enabled President Bhutto to come to India. It also shows the wisdom to come to terms with Pakistan which, under Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, is building a secular, Socialist-oriented democracy, and which will at long last have overcome the main obstacle to its progress.

After an exhaustive and illuminating survey of the world scene—India's relations with the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union shares the Indian view on the maintenance of peace and elimination of racism and colonialism", and the "to

our grave concern, the U.S. policy as it developed impinged on our vital interests") and with China ("We are not engaged in any competition with China, nor have we any hostile intentions"), the American-Soviet and the American-Chinese *detente* being in line with free India's policy of non-alignment and peace—this is how she concluded this post-Summit look at the world, synthesising her concern with national interests with the larger concern for humanity :

Each country has its own heritage and distinct personality which it naturally wishes to develop in its own way. But we must also bear in mind our community of interests and take positive initiatives for working together among ourselves and with other countries in order to make a richer contribution toward the evolution of a world more liveable for all and of a social order more in consonance with the yearnings of modern man.

# 10

## Back To Square One ?

*There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.*

—SHAKESPEARE

*There is a tide in the affairs of women,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads—  
God knows where !*

—BYRON

THE SIMLA SUMMIT WAS THE PINNACLE OF GREATNESS FOR Indira Gandhi.

By democratic process, and by popular acclaim, she was recognized, loved, looked up to and (by some) even feared, as the supreme leader of the Indian people, representing their positive, constructive will, hopes and aspirations.

Out of a crisis and confusion, by mobilising her people in a righteous war, she had achieved speedy and decisive victory. In the hour of her—and her country's—triumph, she had shown rare magnanimity and concern for human values, by ordering a unilateral cease-fire on the Western front within hours of the victory in the East. This was, perhaps, the greatest, the wisest as well as a humane decision of her seven-years career as the Prime Minister.

On behalf of India, she showed as much friendly interest in,

and concern for, the tasks of rehabilitation and reconstruction in Bangla Desh, as she had, earlier, resolutely supported the cause of liberation. But, in dealing with Pakistan, she had revealed her true greatness by extending the hand of friendship and offering peace with honour, to the vanquished enemy, and did not change her policy even when personal insults were heaped on her by the unpredictable and volatile Mr. Bhutto. She had a clear vision of India, Pakistan, Bangla Desh, along with Nepal in the North and Ceylon in the South, as one great land mass, the sprawling sub-continent of Peace. She did not allow personal pique to come in the way of her striving to realize that constructive, co-operative vision. In that moment, she was more than the greatest living leader of India, she was (like her father before her) the embodiment of the peaceful urges and aspirations of the whole of Asia, hoping and to live in dignity and liberty, free at last from interference and exploitation.

Standing on the Simla Summit she looked seven-foot tall. By virtue of her strength and her wisdom, which was the strength and wisdom of her country and her people, she had acquired national eminence and an international stature second to none, with the exception of Mao Tse-Tung who, however, belonged to the earlier generation of Lenin, Gandhi, Ho Chi Minh and Nehru.

In the flood-tide of Indira Gandhi's popularity and political power, it was the high water-mark. Since then, however, there has been visible, audible and noticeable recession of what used to be called the Indira Wave. Just after less than a year of the Simla Conference, one reads in the newspapers the same sort of disturbing headlines that characterised the period of popular launching of that missile that hit her on the nose at Bhubhaneswar in 1967.

Within her Congress Party, the party in power with a decisive majority at the Centre and in most of the states, there is the same Bossism, the same factionalism, the same hankering for power and privileges, the same hypocrisy and the same nepotism and other forms of corruption. Within the country there are the same contrasts and disparities between the wealth of the affluent few and the miserable condition of the millions. The *Kulaks* have taken over the Greco Revolution,

usurping all the advantages and benefits of modern agriculture, tractor farming and improved seed varieties. The spiral of rising prices has been the last straw on the back of the patient camel that, proverbially, has been the long-suffering Indian people.

The hope that Indira Gandhi had kindled in the hearts of the people with progressive measures like bank-nationalisation and the abolition of privy purses has long since been dimmed, if not altogether extinguished. And the same people who were once eulogising Indira Gandhi and calling her *Annapurna Devi* (Goddess of Prosperity) are now blaming her for everything—for every scarcity, every price-rise, every act of commission and omission for which her Government is, directly or indirectly, responsible.

Are we then back to Bhuhaneswar or (as she has said in another context) "back to square one?"

It almost seemed as if some perverse and malevolent spirit that came to Simla with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had remained behind to put a *hadoo* on all of Indira Gandhi's plans and programmes for the betterment of the life of her people. It would not have been more effective if there had been a regular, planned conspiracy to spike her guns, to rob her larder of provisions, to dry her rivers and her wells, to spread confusion and dissension among her lieutenants, and to infect many of her followers with the virus of communal, linguistic and provincial hysteria.

The Jana Sangh had predictably taken the lead in organising a patched-up opposition to the Simla Agreement, while the mass of the people rejoiced in the prospects of sub-continental peace. Hardly had this slightly ridiculous (but potentially mischievous) 'war against peace' begun over the patently absurd allegations about Secret Clauses in the Agreement, when warning signals began to be manifested in all parts of the country. In July, the month which began with the whole world applauding the statesmanship and magnanimity of Indira Gandhi, she had to worry about other and less pleasant things.

Serious differences of opinion, and emphasis, were revealed in the Congress Working Committee over Land Reforms in general and the question of imposing ceilings, in particular. She must

have been dismayed to find the *Kulak* interests powerfully represented by the Farmers' Lobby and by several important Chief Ministers. The full-page headline in a Leftist news weekly which was a critical supporter of Indira Gandhi's policies and programmes posed the vital question : WILL LAND REFORMS FIZZLE OUT IN A PAPER REVOLUTION ?<sup>1</sup>

From Tamil Nadu in the South came the disturbing news of an agriculturist demonstration being fired upon by trigger-happy policemen resulting in the death of twenty, and bullet injuries to over fifty. Tamil Nadu was ruled not by the Prime Minister's party but by Dravida Munnetra Kazagham which had won at the polls on a partly separatist and partly pseudo-progressive manifesto. Before her triumph in the Lok Sabha elections of 1971, the exigencies of democratic politics had made Indira Gandhi dependent upon the support of D.M.K. members in the Lok Sabha, specially in the crucial period after the Great Divide. She no longer had to rely upon the D.M.K. votes to retain her Parliamentary majority, but an uneasy truce continued to mark the relations of the Centre and the southern state.

In the same week, newspapers published—and Indira Gandhi must have been dismayed to read—allegations of "bribery, corruption, and red tape" against the management of the multi-crore Khatri Copper Mines, another public-sector project being used and exploited by private profiteers. It was revealed that most of the work of this project, like many other national undertakings, was being handled by contractors.

In Maharashtra, again on the land ceilings issue, there was a tug of war between the Bombay Pradesh Congress Committee and the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee—the B.P.C.C. and the M.P.C.C., as they are called. The Maharashtra Committee was, obviously, under the rich farmers' influence. This was not something that Indira Gandhi could brush aside very easily, for it was under such pressures that the Congress Working Committee decided to whittle down the recommendations of the high-power panel appointed by the A.I.C.C. not only in the matter of excluding of major children from the definition of "family", but also to exempt tea, coffee,

1. *Blitz News Magazine*, July 15, 1972.

cardamom and rubber plantations (many of them, specially in Kerala and Assam, owned by foreign interests) were permitted to continue their exploitation. Indira Gandhi must have noted that even newspapers generally favourable to her were sounding critical, and concluding that "though the senile Syndicate leaders have been driven into the political wilderness, their outlook continues to over-shadow the Congress."<sup>1</sup>

Indira Gandhi tried to stem the tide by again re-shuffling her Cabinet, inducting at least some dynamic minds "committed" to her Socialist policy and programmes. Mohan Kumaramangalam, the brilliant former Communist, son of veteran Congress leader Dr. P. Subbaroyan, was already doing good work in the Steel Ministry. Now, the Cabinet was re-inforced by the inclusion of D.P. Dhar and T.A. Pai. D.P., as Ambassador to Moscow and later, as Indira Gandhi's Foreign Policy Adviser, had negotiated the crucial Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, and proved his negotiating ability before and during the Simla Summit talks, while T.A. Pai was a banker and economist of the new school who had already made a mark as the Chairman of the Life Insurance Corporation. Indira assigned the Planning portfolio to D.P. Dhar and entrusted the Railways Ministry to Pai, hoping that they would be a source of strength to her in the pursuit of her progressive policies.

Next month was not only the anniversary—but the twenty-fifth anniversary—of Indian freedom and, on this occasion, it was not very pleasant for the Prime Minister to have to admit that, after a quarter century of independence, "whereas democracy has come to stay and proved itself, economic freedom in the shape of improvement in the daily lives of our common people has yet to be achieved." Surely, there must be something wrong with a democracy which, after so many years, could not ensure two square meals to all the people. Strangely enough, within weeks of the triumph of her statesmanship at Simla, on the eve of the August 15, anniversary of freedom, Indira Gandhi was getting congratulations from foreign Heads of State but sombre warnings from her own people—including some of her staunchest friends. One of them warned of "Indira

1. *Blitz news magazine*, July 29, 1972.



Gandhi's Difficult Days Ahead" and, a few days later, wrote: "At home the challenges are forbidding. The economic situation is not going to be easy to tackle. And with it comes the political question of retaining mass support.... With the potentialities for unprecedented difficulties facing her Government, Smt. Gandhi can hardly afford to be complacent about the challenges that promise to come up, both at home and abroad, both political and economic."<sup>1</sup>

While in foreign relations, the Prime Minister continued to take a principled and independent stand, regardless of the displeasure it caused in Washington, her handling of the domestic and specially economic problems, showed signs of weakening. The war had resulted in victory—but at a heavy cost. The bill for only 15 days of warfare was tremendous. Playing host to millions of refugees over a period of months had strained the national economy to the maximum. The new country of Bangla Desh had to be helped to rehabilitate itself, after almost a year of carnage and destruction. The United States of America, smarting under the humiliating defeat of its loyal ally, was tightening the economic screw. There had been another year when the fickle goddess of Rain had played truant, and there was drought everywhere, with the resultant shortage of water and consequently, of hydroelectric power.

The economic situation was bleak, indeed, but not entirely hopeless for five hundred million people, armed with faith and knowledge, the will to survive, the technological means to achieve the miracle of revival, and the leadership of a woman of great vision and resolute purpose. Other countries and other peoples had survived greater hardships and handicaps—Germany and Japan after defeat and decimation in World War II, North Vietnam, despite the 'gruellingest' bombardment by the world's most powerful air armada. Could India do it? Could Indira do it? Or was she, the resolute and fearless one, now losing her nerve? For some time, and to some people, it did seem so.

The veteran special correspondent, A. Raghavan of *Blitz*,

*Mainstream Weekly Review*, July 23, 1972.

reported from New Delhi that a deputation on behalf of the nationalised General Insurance Companies—consisting of J.R.D. Tata, J.D. Choksi and N.A. Palkhivala—had met the Prime Minister in an attempt to halt a Government decision to pay Rs. 33 crores as compensation for the General Insurance Companies that had been nationalised. They demanded many times that amount, though the compensation for Life Insurance Companies was 5 crores, and oo ooc had issued a howl of protest. Not only was the comparable volume of General Insurance business much less, but the aggregate paid-up capital of all the nationalised General Insurance companies was only 13 crores. They were being offered much more than twice that amount, and yet (like *Oliver Twist*) that were asking for more. Why didn't Indira Gandhi show the door to the three wise men of Big Business? Why was she seemingly ready to compromise on the quantum of compensation?

There could be only one explanation. N.A. Palkhivala, "the distinguished attorney of Big Business," had found a legal loophole in the Compensation Formula, and politely threatened judicial proceedings in the Supreme Court, as he had done—and successfully—on the issue of Banks Nationalisation! It appeared that the Prime Minister had indicated her readiness to raise the scale of compensation in order, apparently, to avoid a long and frustrating legal battle in the Supreme Court which, she rightly felt, was weighted against any constitutional measures aimed at social or economic transformation. The lady stooped—to conquer? After the formula of compensation was revised, the take-over of General Insurance—one of the cardinal 10-points in the Economic Programme adopted by the Congress in 1967—was complete. But evidently the memory remained and rankled. How long was the Prime Minister, and the people of India to be blackmailed into submission by those who had the means to engage high-priced counsel to plead before a Supreme Court presided over by learned Judges who might be well-versed in Law and Judicial procedures, but who were out of tune with the times and the imperatives of Social change?

It is not inconceivable that, on that day, she made discreet enquiries when the Chief Justice of India was due for retire-

ment The full drama of supercession, with its comical, tragic and melodramatic interludes, would still have to wait for several months to unfold. The lady had patience, and a shrewd sense of timing!

In September the ominous shadow of drought was lengthening over the land. Indira Gandhi read the disturbing news that over a million people and an equal number of milch cattle were in the grip of acute famine, described as the worst ever in the living memory of Kutch. During a tour of the area, a reporter "saw pathetic sights of grief-stricken men, women, and children, famished cattle, and parched land"—a condition much worse than the two earlier famines of 1900 and 1940 which forced the local population to move to far-off places like Africa. The drought was raising its head in Maharashtra, Bihar, parts of Uttar Pradesh, Andhra, not to speak of the chronically parched lands in the Rajasthan desert. This was a challenge to the Government of India, and to Indira Gandhi personally, far more menacing than all the armies of Pakistan—or even of China and America, combined!

The calamity could no longer be blamed on God—or cruel nature or fickle weather. Indira Gandhi could not say, like Mahatma Gandhi, that such disasters were God's way of punishing the people for their sin of untouchability.

As a modern-minded, pragmatist Socialist, she knew that society and the Government as the main instrument of society, could and should have done a lot to provide for such contingencies. Her father had started the great Bhakra-Nangal complex of dams and canals but, after twenty years, the Rajasthan Canal had crept only a few miles to transform the Rajasthan desert. The pace of construction had been slowed down by a lazy bureaucracy, inefficient utilisation of the digging machinery imported at great cost. Not far from the un-lined bed of the Rajsamand Canal, I saw million-dollar "Dredline" cranes and catwalks, and useless in the desert of Jaisselmer, lying in the "y wheels" machinery.

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Soviet Central Asia had been dug at ten times the speed with which the Rajasthan Canal, snail-like, was creeping over the desert. Most of the villagers had lost all interest in it, because it appeared to them as a distant dream, not relevant to the immediate need of water in their own times.

It had taken several droughts and near-famines to make our state governments tube-well-conscious, but after momentary enthusiasm, the programme had got bogged down in a morass of bureaucratic sloth and corruption and the inertia of the people. Could one woman, however enlightened and energetic, even with all the state apparatus at her command, transform the thousand years stratification of a caste-bound society, in which (in Bihar during the Great Drought I could bear) College-going students blandly declared that their caste rules did not permit them to dig wells like the menial Harijans?

Drought and inertia were not the only problem facing Indira Gandhi in the last quarter of 1972. Also a problem was the mis-guided and mis-directed dynamism of the lumpen proletariat, not only in metropolitan cities like Calcutta and Bombay, but nearer home in her own capital city of Delhi. There were sporadic but serious clashes between mobs (including street urchins) and the police, attacks on police stations and the burning of police vans. Urban violence is a world-wide phenomenon which is caused by a variety of social and psychological causes, almost all stemming from social maladjustment, and the presence of 'alienated' rowdy elements. The 'urban guerilla' (locally called *mawali* or *goonda*) has been in existence in India, much before his counterparts appeared on the streets of Chicago, Los Angeles and Dublin. But what was surprising and ominously significant in the Delhi clashes was that the houses of prominent Congress leaders were chosen for attacks!

No doubt the Jana Sangh elements had exploited the popular mood for their own political, anti-Congress ends. But the urchins who stoned police vans and Congressmen's residences, as symbols of an Establishment that had forsaken their sympathy, were the same who, a few months earlier, were going round with Congress flags, soliciting votes for the Congress. During the emergence of the New Congress, and

ment The full drama of supercession, with its comical, tragic and melodramatic interludes, would still have to wait for several months to unfold. The lady had patience, and a shrewd sense of timing!

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party had to undertake a drastic operation to rid itself of such elements.

The danger of a similar attempt being made again by these elements is definitely there. But I believe that the best remedy for these ills and ailments lies in vigorous implementation of our socialist programmes and in creating a political atmosphere and public opinion so that the unhealthy elements may not dare to oppose our march towards socialist transformation of society.

What the Congress President forgot to mention was that these unhealthy elements opposed to social transformation were present in the highest echelons of power within the Congress governments, both at the Centre and in many of the States, and by virtue of their positions, they not only delayed the implementation of the Congress policies and programmes but influenced the decisions of that body at the highest level.

The Prime Minister herself seemed to be conscious of the problem, for she alluded to it in another context at a meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Party. She spoke of the need to "modernise the organisation in the light of changed circumstances." Specifically referring to the criticism of indiscriminate admission of defectors from other parties to the Congress, she said it must be assessed whether the organisation had gained from the admission of such members with a questionable political past. The Prime Minister's remark at the same meeting that the Congress should function as a kind of "vigilance corps" all along the line was a significant pointer. Was she thinking of transforming it into a cadre-based party of politically-conscious, trained and tested individuals, committed to the dynamics of social transformation, instead of continuing to be a happy hunting ground for the opportunists and office-seekers who would just walk in by signing the Membership Form, without their political commitments being scrutinized and tested?

Twenty years earlier, too, when for the first time she became a Member of the Congress Working Committee and began to take interest in the Party organisation, she was supposed to have taken a "highly unorthodox line on Party matters". The

reforms legislation passed by certain states contained loopholes big enough for elephants to pass through. About the takeover of the trade in foodgrains he had no sympathy for the wholesalers whom he described as the Captains of the parallel economy of black money.

The other side of the coin was presented by the former External Affairs Minister Dinesh Singh who, in a note to the Congress President, said that it seemed India was back to 1965, with food shortage, dependence on food imports, price rise, and erosion of the value of the rupee.

In her traditional closing speech, Indira Gandhi demonstrated that, despite all the difficulties, she was bubbling with self-confidence and with confidence in her people. Jayaprakash Narayan had said that Indira Gandhi was departing from the path of Mahatma Gandhi. In a fighting peroration, Indira said that, if the situation and the interests of the country so demanded, she would deviate from what Gandhiji said or what her own father said—and that is what Gandhi and Nehru would have liked her to do! In the idolatrous atmosphere generally prevalent at Congress sessions, where the names of Gandhi and Nehru are so often flaunted, it was a refreshing assertion of her independence of mind.

The two-mindedness of the Congress chieftains, however, was more than apparent at this session, too. Many of the Chief Ministers were not happy over the State take-over of the foodgrains trade though they did not have the courage to defy the Prime Minister by openly speaking or voting against it. It was a situation indicative of the two fairly balanced forces within the Congress. The Chief Ministers and their conservative supporters could not openly come out against the Prime Minister. But the Prime Minister, too, hesitated to publicly castigate them for their hesitations and non-implementation of Congress policies. And, it seemed that in her annoyance, she let herself go at the ineffectual ultra-leftism of a solitary Krishan Kant who was, probably, voicing the bitterness of the people in a needlessly provocative manner!

But, it appeared that the criticism of poor Krishan Kant, however tactlessly it might have been phrased, was not altogether groundless. For within two weeks of the session held in

veteran journalist Durga Das has this to say on the matter :

An individual might rise to towering heights, she said, but he was essentially built through the Party. In Russia, she added, the Communist Party kept a close watch on the Government and sacked Ministers if they failed. "The sooner we do so in India the better."

This view ran counter to Nehru's theory of parliamentary government under which the parliamentary wing of the party must be free from the control of the organisational wing. Kripalani resigned from the Congress presidency on this issue...<sup>1</sup>

When I drew her attention to this quotation, she replied, "I have made no such statement. I have never advocated that the Congress Party should function like the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Our systems of Government are entirely different. We are a mass-based party and wish to remain so."<sup>2</sup>

Her prickly self-consciousness on this subject is understandable for, as she added, "To-day there is a concerted campaign being mounted to brand me as a Communist or as a tool of the Communists."

The Gandhi Nagar Session of the A.I.C.C. brought Indira Gandhi face to face with most of these problems, and all the strains and stresses in the country. In one respect, it was a triumph for her, for D.P. Dhar, as the spokesman for the Prime Minister's progressive policies, was able to push through the decision to take over the wholesale trade in foodgrains in the two all-important cereals—wheat and rice—eight long years after the Congress originally took this decision at Bhubaneswar, the last session attended by Jawaharlal Nehru. Against his predecessor, C. Subramaniam's sophisticated arguments, Dhar categorically stated that the 1956 Industrial Policy resolution drafted by Jawaharlal Nehru himself, still continued to be the basis of India's industrial policy, and needed no modification as suggested by Subramaniam. He was obviously speaking for the Prime Minister when he lamented that land

1. *India From Curzon To Nehru & After.*

2. In a letter to the Author.



Indians a chance to feel inspired by what had been achieved by *their* labour, *their* intelligence, *their ingenuity* and *their resourcefulness*. It would demonstrate the cultural diversity and the economic interdependence of the different states of India.

In many ways, the Asia 72 Fair was the embodiment of everything that Indira Gandhi had said and done, felt and willed, during the seven years of her Prime Ministership. Designed and constructed with an aesthete's eye, with modern art motifs which were yet peculiarly Indian, and decorated with a characteristically feminine flair for the beautiful and the elegant, it had regional, national and international features that seemed to be right out of Jawaharlal's essay on Unity Within Diversity in his *Discovery of India*. From the beginning, Indira Gandhi had desired and willed and ordered that this Fair be comprehensively representative of the New India that was being built on the foundations of Democracy, Socialism, Secularism and World Peace.

The ground-breaking ceremony was held on an appropriate day—14th November, 1971—the 81st birthday of Jawaharlal Nehru, whose ideas were principally embodied in the Fair. Indira Gandhi refused to perform the ceremony. In fact, she insisted that it be performed not by a Minister or a V. I. P. but by representatives of the workers, men and women, who were to actually break the ground to prepare for the Fair. And so, while the flags of India, of the United Nations, and of the participating countries fluttered in the cold morning breeze, two workers—Beldar Bhagwati Prasad and helper Kesari Devi—mounted the platform and took their seats on chairs, along with the Chairman of the Steering Committee, Mohamed Yunus, and the Chief Engineer Ramadorai. Bhagwati Prasad, who had the bearing of a '*neta*', was asked to speak first and struck the characteristically practical and optimistic note, "Earlier we were uncared for and disrespected. Now we are taken care of and respected. That is why I am here." One man speaking for the hundreds of millions of unknown toilers. After a couple of more speeches by Yunus and Ramadorai, the turbaned Bhagwati Prasad and the partly-veiled Kesari Devi took up their spades and shovels, and literally broke new

the new capital of Gujarat, the Congress lost the bye-election for the Lok Sabha in Ahmedabad, only a few miles away. And people were heard saying that the Indira Gandhi Wave of mass popularity had passed the climactic level, and was now on the decline. Nor was the result of this election to be dismissed only as an isolated defeat from which no generalisation could be made. If the triumph at Maniram (in Uttar Pradesh) was a pointer to the landslide victory of the New Congress all over the country in 1971, couldn't the defeat at Ahmedabad also be a pointer in the other direction?

The remarkable thing was that, despite opposition from without and opposition even from within her own party, Indira Gandhi, like her father before her, was managing to get things done. Soon she was commissioning the first blast furnace of the country's fourth public sector steel plant at Bokaro. Like Bhilai, it was being set up with Soviet assistance and collaboration. It was the first steel plant which had been set up entirely within Indira Gandhi's seven years term of office. It was also, for all intents and purposes, a *swadeshi* steel mill—for only 36 per cent components and equipments had been imported in the first stage, while in the second stage it would come down to 17 per cent. (The corresponding figures in Bhilai had been 86 per cent in the first stage, and 77 per cent in the second stage.)

In a characteristically brief speech, Mrs. Gandhi said on this occasion that the Bokaro plant symbolised Indo-Soviet friendship and co-operation, and India's determination to be economically self-reliant. She congratulated the workers whose hard work had made it possible for the plant to be set up in record time.

Even more significant than Bokaro was the Asia 72 Fair that was organised in Delhi towards the end of the year, under the direct guidance and personal supervision of Indira Gandhi. Here was a project which instinctively appealed to the multi-faceted personality of the Prime Minister. It would bring together the countries of Asia in an atmosphere of peaceful creation and friendly competition. It would give India an opportunity to put her best foot forward and demonstrate to Asia—and to the world—her achievements in the realm of industrialisation and national reconstruction. It would give millions of

not been able to shake itself free from exploitation.

Must this continue? Asia should cast aside its differences and unite, not in opposition to other continents and regions, not in any spirit of pan-Asian chauvinism, but solely for the welfare of its people who have so long been harried and impoverished, and who so desperately need peace and the wherewithal to live in decency and honour. We have no wish to compete, nor are we rivals of any country. We do believe that progress and peace in India are linked with peace and progress in the world. We work not merely for our own salvation but for a world where all may live in harmony.

Her closing words, stirring as they were, embodied the facts of contemporary international life :

A new consciousness is awakening that a total view should be taken of the Earth's resources and their conservation and equitable utilisation. Nations must co-operate, the advanced with the backward, the rich with the poor, the big with the small, the Asian with European, American, African, Australian, if this Earth, our only home, is to become not a plundered planet but one of peace and plenty.

At last she had claimed the inheritance not only of her father's international vision, his Socialist ideology, but also of his lyrical turn of phrase :

Though she seemed to be impervious, or at least indifferent, to criticism of her Government and her Party, and sometimes she seemed excessively optimistic in assessing the national condition, it was not always so. She kept her ears to the ground to catch the seismographic convulsions in her country. It was only that she did not believe in always publicly airing self-criticism. But there were significant exceptions as in a speech at the Calcutta session of the Congress.

In this speech, she gave a call for total over-hauling of the Congress by cleansing it of undesirable elements even if it led to the shedding of the unnecessary flabbiness of the Party. She even said, accepting, by implication, the idea of a cadre-based party, "Perhaps it will be good if we started afresh as a small

ground!<sup>1</sup> Indira Gandhi was not there, but it was she who had inspired the occasion.

When the fantastic complex of massive and artistically-designed pavillions were completed, and the flags of fifty Asian and other nations proclaimed their participation in this colourful Asian Drama, Indira Gandhi inaugurated the Fair—exactly a year after the ground-breaking done by another woman, Kesari Devi. Indira Gandhi, while inaugurating the Asia 72, made one of the most memorable and dynamic speeches on the theme of Asian unity, since her father addressed the Asian Relations Conference that had been held not far from here in 1947. She quoted from the words of Jawaharlal Nehru uttered on that historic occasion, and thus lifted an industrial exposition to the eminence of an awakened Continent:

For too long have we of Asia been petitioners in western courts and chancelleries. That story must now belong to the past. We propose to stand on our own legs, and to cooperate with all others who are prepared to co-operate with us. We do not intend to be playthings of others.

From the rostrum at Asia 72, her strident and challenging voice went out to the statesmen and peoples of Asia—and of the World:

Although the old empires have receded, Asia remains an arena for the contest of world powers. Most of the conflicts since World War II have erupted on our continent. Many have been the outcome of the interference of outsiders and not one (of these wars) has helped the people of Asia in any way.

Many concepts are sought to be tested with Asian blood. And so the world's largest continent, the home of more than half of mankind, the cradle of the world's most ancient cultures, the fount of all the great religions, has

1. For the details of the ground-breaking ceremony I am indebted to the eye-witness account written by Hamteeduddin Mehmood 'in' *the magazine Sangre, dated 10<sup>th</sup> June 1972*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Madras.

first sign that this programme, could become a practical reality in their own lives.

This was one of the most satisfying days in her life as the Prime Minister. For here, under the guidance of an enlightened State government, and with the help of writers, intellectuals, artistes and film stars who collected the initial funds for the scheme, but mainly with the voluntary labour of the people themselves who were the ultimate beneficiaries of the scheme, clean and decent, *pucca*, white-washed houses were being constructed and distributed to one of the weakest and poorest sections of society. Here was *Garibi Hatao* in action—not as a boon granted from above but by inspiring, guiding, educating and helping the people to help themselves. This is what she had always meant when she said that the people themselves should, and would, help to eradicate poverty.

The drought situation was becoming more serious, specially in Maharashtra and Gujarat, both of which the Prime Minister visited personally. The separatist agitation in Andhra and Telangana was becoming dangerous and violent. Even the Award given by Indira Gandhi, had not succeeded in pouring oil over troubled waters, and failed to reconcile the two warring and separatist factions to try to live together in one state. Foreign newspapers were publishing exaggerated accounts of the Andhra agitation. A *TIME* magazine correspondent told her that he had gathered the impression that the people believed that India, caught between all these troubles, was going nowhere. He wanted to know if it was true that the position was so hopeless. She spiritedly answered back, asking a question in return. "If this were true, could we have managed 10 million refugees from Bangla Desh, the war with Pakistan and the drought this year? Obviously it is not true."

But was she feeling frustrated and helpless in view of these overwhelming difficulties—the drought, the separatist regional agitations, the eruptions of mob violence, the rising prices and the scarcities? It was not like her, but a report from Pratapgarh (in Uttar Pradesh) said that she said in a speech that she was prepared to quit if this would help solve the Andhra problem and other problems. Perhaps she had been misreported,

party and spread in the masses our principles and policies." She was confident that the Congress would then become a mighty force.

Reiterating her firm faith in Socialism, she significantly remarked, "The country has once again reached the cross-roads," and held the internal dissensions in the Congress to be responsible for the slow pace of implementation of the Socialist programmes of the Party.

Describing the "grave" incidents that had taken place in Andhra and Assam, she said whenever regional passions were aroused, all programmes for waging a battle against poverty came to a halt. "One wondered, therefore, whether the real design of those who sowed seeds of such troubles was not to divert us from the path to which we are committed. It is likely that parties opposed to the Congress policies and programmes did not actually foment these troubles. But they certainly take advantage of them."

It was during the same speech that she alluded to the policy of the U.S. Government by saying that there were powerful forces in the world which continue to wish that India did not succeed in its efforts to strengthen itself. With diplomatic under-statement, she added, "They may not be our enemies, but they are also not our friends."

The new year began for Indira Gandhi with a hopefully auspicious visit to Kerala. Here she could see positive steps towards eradication of poverty being taken by a state government in which her party was a partner under the Communist Chief Minister, Achuta Meon.

The occasion was the handing over of the first batch of 1,000 houses to landless agricultural workers, while the whole scheme envisaged the building of one lakh of houses for the farm labourers. Indira Gandhi, who was in a hopeful and optimistic mood, formally and symbolically handed over the keys of one of the houses to a Harijan agricultural worker, Kuttan, at Poothvikka (near Cochin) amidst stormy applause from about half a million men and women who had gathered to see, and to listen to, her. They had heard of her, and of her *Garibi Hatao* programme, and today they were witnessing the

Her Finance Minister's budget disappointed many of her friends, and the friends of her Socialist policies. It was apparent that she and the Finance Ministry had been unable to resist pressures not to further curb monopolies. No steps were taken to fight the parallel economy of Black Money. While it was not a full-fledged Socialist budget, it was yet tilted in favour of the common man whose essential needs and requirements were exempted from direct taxation. The middle classes, however, were not spared, and they would have to bear the burden of rising prices occasioned by increased indirect taxation on commodities, for instance, like petrol which would result in enhanced bus and taxi fares.

But, in a forthright speech, while addressing the annual session of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, the Prime Minister rejected most of the demands of Big Business—including a suggestion that Government should reconsider the decision to take over the wholesale trade in foodgrains. "It was neither a sudden nor a rash decision," she said, and added that it was a sequel to persistent demands of the common man—specially the rural producers and consumers—and was meant to eliminate hoarding and speculation which cause abnormal rise in prices. She did not mince her words when she warned the private sector that if it remained content with seeking new licences only for the more profitable units, the State would have to intervene in order to achieve the targets in production of people's necessities.

Strangely enough, the opposition parties have never reacted so violently and so solidly joined ranks—neither over the banks nationalisation nor over the takeover of the wholesale trade in foodgrains—as they did over the supersession of three Supreme Court Judges and the appointment of A.N. Ray as the Chief Justice of India. They evidently recognized—and rightly so—that the assertion of the Government's authority in the appointment of one Judge bespoke the Prime Minister's decision not to allow even the Supreme Court to come in the way of her government's radical programmes aimed at social transformation.

It was apparent that the Supreme Court—or, at least, the

perhaps it was a way of her saying that she was doing her best, no one else had a chance to do better. If someone can do better (she might have implied) I am prepared to make room for him.

But the Socialist Party, still suffering from the incorrigible anti-Nehru and anti-Indira complex, immediately and quixotically welcomed the reported offer of the Prime Minister "to step down" and demanded that Mrs. Gandhi should resign forthwith and save the people of Andhra from "further agony and misery." Apart from the Socialist Party and other opposition parties, there was consternation and dismay all over the country, the general and dominant feeling being : It could not be true ! It *should not* be true !

The next day, back in Delhi, the Prime Minister set all rumours and speculation at rest when she told the Congress Parliamentary Party meeting that she would not relinquish her responsibility to the nation because of the pressure of agitation by a section of the people. "I do not want to stick to this position (of Prime Ministership)", she said, "but I will not go as a result of pressure. If I decide to go, I will do so when I think I have completed my job."

Incidentally, at the same meeting, she declared her credo as an administrator and a political campaigner. "I welcome fight. The best in me comes out when there is a fight.

Though let down by many of her colleagues—specially the Chief Ministers, most of whom have successfully side-tracked the radical Land Reforms, she has firmly and resolutely resisted all indigenous and foreign pressures aimed at making her give up the Socialist path and her policies and programmes which she has pursued in the interest of the people.

In January she took over the non-coking coal mines, despite the efforts of the mine-owners to defraud the Government by hiding their property which tended to disappear overnight, on the eve of the take-over.

In February, her Government took over the wholesale trade in foodgrains, in the face of the combined forces of the opposition and the diabolical conspiracy of the traders to hide stocks, create artificial scarcities, and indulge in hoarding and black-marketing, to create a panic among the people.



addressed the Conference under their strangely combined shadow.

It was not just some defectors from one party joining another party. This was principled re-joining of the old Party which the Socialists had left to form, first the Congress Socialist Party and, later, the Socialist Party—because they felt the Congress itself was now working for Socialism. The enthusiasm with which Indira Gandhi welcomed this decision (as she had welcomed the coming in of former Communists and non-party radicals in Bombay), and coupled with the co-operative spirit which informed the working of the Congress-Communists alliance in Kerala, indicated the importance that she attached to the radicalisation of the Congress by the influx of new, younger, elements committed to Socialism.

The other event was the Great March which the Communist Party and its affiliated organisations of workers and peasants, led in Delhi to present a petition to the Prime Minister and Parliament, representing the grievances of the people—specially the rising prices, the tardy pace of Land Reforms, the delay in implementation of the Socialist programme and the continuing flourishing of monopolies.

This great and historic concourse of half a million people, men and women, and even children, had come from all parts of India. The Communist Party of India had mobilised them, but they were not all Communists—they were peasants, workers, students, unemployed youth. It was not a do-or-die demonstration as in the olden days, when Communist activists loved to provoke a clash and invite police brutalities (as they believed) to ignite and inflame the revolutionary ardour of the masses. It was a peaceful, sober, disciplined but determined march. For once the Communists were raising not Party slogans, but People's slogans which echoed the voice of *all* the people, irrespective of their Party affiliations. It heartened the common people of Delhi, irrespective of whether they were Congressmen or Communists or belonging to no party, while it undoubtedly annoyed and irked the vested interests.

The *Times of India* reporter quoted the remark of an unsympathetic onlooker overheard en route. "It is not a stage-managed show. It is a state-managed show."

majority of its Judges were acting as a brake to stop, to slow down and to delay, India's forward march towards Socialism. As the late S. Mohan Kumarmangalam who must have been the principal adviser to the Prime Minister in this decision, said in Parliament, "Let us not forget the last six years of background of what can only be described as a confrontation between Parliament and the Government, on the one hand, and the Supreme Court, on the other.... The Court looked at things in one way and we looked in another way."

Referring to the Bank Nationalisation Act—Indira Gandhi's first decisive step towards Socialism—he said, "It was historic, and it was welcomed throughout the length and breadth of the country...(but the Supreme Court) struck down the Bank Nationalisation Act...so, in a docile way, we followed in the footsteps of the judges and reframed the Act...I think, it cost the country quite a number of crores more." Therefore, it was more prudent for the Prime Minister and the Government to choose a Chief Justice and other Judges of the Supreme Court who shared their political and social philosophy so that their class bias or predilections would not prejudice them on issues of vital concern to the mass of the people.

It was one of the most momentous decisions taken by Indira Gandhi and the firmness with which she stood by her decision, disregarding all the hullabaloo raised by the combined opposition and the opposition Press, certainly did credit to a Prime Minister who was trying the difficult and the almost unprecedented task of using democratic methods to bring about a social transformation in her country.

Two seemingly minor episodes complete the story of Indira Gandhi's years in office.

On April 21, at Chandauli near Varanasi, the Prime Minister welcomed more than 2,000 Socialist Party leaders and workers from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi who had joined the Congress *en bloc*, in response to her call for consolidation of the socialist forces. Symbolically enough, the stage of the Socialist Conference at which this decision was taken, was decorated by two large portraits of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia. Their two philosophies seemed to have met and merged in the person of Indira Gandhi who

## She Who Rides The Tiger

*The best qualities of the ruler are : Born of a high family, godly, possessed of valour, seeing through the medium of aged persons, virtuous, truthful, not of a contradictory nature, grateful, having large aims, highly enthusiastic, not addicted to procrastination, powerful enough to control his neighbouring Kings, of resolute mind, having an assembly of ministers of no mean quality, and possessed of a taste for discipline....*

*A wise ruler can make even the poor and miserable elements of his sovereignty happy and prosperous....*

—KAUTILYA IN "ARTHASHASTRA"

WHAT DO HER CONTEMPORARIES—FRIENDS AS WELL AS FOES—think of Indira Gandhi ?

Yahya Khan, before he met his Waterloo amidst the paddy fields and swamps of Bangla Desh, contemptuously dismissed her as "That Woman !"

"Cold-blooded and tough", is how Dr. Henry Kissinger described her in one of his secret briefings made public by Jack Anderson.

This was not the stray remark of an individual. It reflected the views of the "Grand Alliance" parties whose spokesmen in Parliament raised a hue and cry over the alleged ticketless travelling of thousands in trains for this March. It was even charged that the Prime Minister herself had sanctioned it, and issued instructions to the Railway staff not to stop the ticketless 'marchers' coming to Delhi. Preposterous as the charge was, this was also the impression that several railway officials had. A writer friend from Lucknow, who also happens to be a minor railway official, told me that the general impression at the Lucknow railway station was that the Prime Minister did not want the ticketless would-be marchers crowding the trains to be interfered with.

All this might have been just a canard or hearsay, but I do think it reflected a very important reality. Whether she would admit it or not, Indira Gandhi welcomed this great and organised demonstration of the people's mood, as they marched in their lakhs to present their Charter of Demands. This charter hardly contained anything which she was not committed to implement—this was her programme, too—it was the programme of the people—but she needed the people's help to bring it about. And she needed this demonstration, this public pressure, to persuade others, and to persuade herself, that the people, indeed, are getting angry and bitterly frustrated with their living conditions, with ever-rising prices, with low wages, with education without employment, with the glaring disparities, inequities and injustices. She had said before that the people are in a hurry. Now she needed to know that the people are impatient for change.

The Prime Minister needed the people's help, the people's pressure, their demonstrations and mobilisation, to be saved from being bogged down again in "Square One" !

Gunnar Myrdal, the Scandinavian economist, says that Indira Gandhi is "the most powerful Indian figure in recent times, more powerful than her father even was or, for the matter of that, Gandhi was during the liberation struggle. She has proved her capacity to make events bow to her will. I have not the slightest doubt that it is her will to carry out radical reforms."

Indicative of her vast popularity even outside the frontier of India are the many Indiras who have been born and named in the Soviet Union. In a recent poll conducted in Yugoslavia, Indira Gandhi was declared to be the world's most popular statesman, followed by Willy Brandt (West Germany), Ceausescu (Rumania), Brezhnev (USSR) and Emperor Haile Sellasie (Ethiopia).

Her own Party colleagues, of course, would publicly proclaim to be enraptured by her—though some, we can be sure, have their tongue in the cheek. But, in November 1971, on the eve of the war with Pakistan and for some time after that, her personality and stature had assumed *national* eminence, above and beyond the Party labels and political differences. Even her staunchest political opponents paid her glowing tributes on her 54th birthday.

Babubhai M. Chinai, an industrialist and member of the "Syndicate" Congress, admitted that she "is creating history." He added, "She thinks boldly like a man and acts like a woman; in other words, her follow up action takes everyone unawares."

S.G. Sardesai of the C.P.I. maintained that she is "growing with life" and elaborated it in these words: "She drew deep, comprehensive, and correct lessons from the debacle of the Congress in the 1967 elections...And having arrived at certain conclusions, she set about implementing her ideas with a combination of tenacity, caution and circumspection, which have now come to be regarded as her characteristic traits."

A.D. Mani, the Independent and independent-minded M.P., said of her. "Mrs Indira Gandhi is one of the most outstanding leaders of the world today and of this century...Mrs. Gandhi knows the Indian people more intimately and more surely than any of her contemporaries."

The late President Charles De Gaulle of France, in one of those gallant Gallic compliments, referred to her as "a lady charged with vast enterprises."

In an off-the-cuff interview with an Italian woman correspondent, President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, with typical lack of grace, once described her as "a woman without initiative and imagination...a mediocre woman with mediocre intelligence." After Simla, however, he had acquired some more tact or, perhaps, a more objective assessment of the Indian Prime Minister's personality. In a long conversation with Editor R.K. Karanjia that took place in Islamabad, he spoke of her as "a lady with a great sense of discipline in her approach to matters. She makes up her mind and tenaciously pursues her objectives." Earlier in the same interview he had said, "I found her to be really her father's daughter in every sense of the word; and when I say that I wish to add that I have always held Mr. Nehru in the highest admiration even when I used to be a student in Bombay."

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, of course, immediately after his release from a Pakistani prison in the wake of the liberation of Bangla Desh, acknowledged his gratitude to "Indira Gandhi, India's Prime Minister, who is not only the leader of men but of mankind."

As for the foreign journalists and writers, John Grigg of *Sunday Times*, London, calls her "the most remarkable ruler since Queen Elizabeth I, whom she resembles in belonging to a great political dynasty and in having the heart of a king, combined with a woman's finesse," though he is careful to point out a basic difference: "Whereas Queen Elizabeth was an absolute monarch, Mrs. Gandhi is a democratic leader, dependent upon the votes of a huge electorate and the support of a Parliamentary majority."

Another British journalist, Phillip Norman, described her as "the most powerful woman in the world...stronger than even Nehru was."

Aubrey Menen, the brilliant Indo-Anglian writer, calls her De Gaulle of India, while John Grigg more appropriately compares her to Roosevelt who also "ran into trouble with the Supreme Court."

Centre in Bombay, may be taken as the frankest and most moving expression of gratitude to her great father: "Most of what I learnt came from him. He was a great teacher. Even to the people of India he was a teacher, and in his many speeches to the villagers, he used to talk of the discoveries of Science and the trends of History.... He created an interest in the world outside in the most backward of our areas, and even today that interest is there."

Then she said, revealing a flash of the Nehru eloquence: "This Centre is not really necessary. The whole of India is his memorial, the confident glow on the faces of the people is his memorial."

Sharing her father's hatred for dogma and blind, unthinking faith, she said that what was required was not a nation of blind followers, no matter of who was being followed.<sup>1</sup> That spirit of enquiry, of reasoning without blind faith, according to her, was what the Nehru Centre should inculcate in the people, specially among the Youth.

Jawaharlal and Indira—the father and the daughter, the teacher and the taught—share more than one equation. He was the first Prime Minister of free India, and (chronologically) she is the third Prime Minister. Never before in the world has a daughter (or, for that matter, son) succeeded the father, in a democratic power-structure.

Inevitably, perhaps, people are heard asking: Hasn't Indira Gandhi proved herself to be a more successful Prime Minister than Jawaharlal Nehru? Isn't she a more capable administrator, a more practical and pragmatist politician, far more astute than her father? Hasn't she got rid of the unwanted "deadwood" in the Cabinet and in the Party hierarchy? Isn't it amazing that she, a woman, won the 14-days war against Pakistan, and helped to liberate Bangla Desh, while in 1962 Nehru lost against Chinese aggression and, in 1966, Lal Bahadur Shastri, instead of a clear victory in the field, had to be content with the Tashkent Pact?

1. I remember Jawaharlal Nehru once telling me, when I was a young student at Aligarh, to question everything that I heard or read—including what he himself might then be saying!

Inevitably, comparisons are made with her father, often complimentary to her, and not unoften with subtle motive and not so-subtle innuendos.

"She is a ten times better politician than her father" Aubrey Menen quotes a Delhi politician.

Nobody ever says that Indira is a more capable administrator than Sardar Patel, or that she is a more astute statesman than Rajagopalachariar. The idea seems to be more to denigrate Nehru than to praise Indira. The double-edged remark quoted by Aubrey Menen was obviously made by a frustrated victim of the Prime Minister's pitiless decision-making. According to Menen, he said, "Nehru never knew how to choose the people he had to work with. She does. Nehru never knew how to get rid of his mistakes. She does. She just says, "Off with his head, and off it goes."

Menen reveals the motives for this politician's remarks. "His hope of office had been high, but he had crossed her. His had been one of the earlier heads to fall."<sup>1</sup>

But, actually, Indira Gandhi is neither taken in by the gushing flatterers nor by the more subtle reactionaries who would damn her with faint praise, but are actually interested in damaging the more enduring image of Jawaharlal Nehru. Her public and private references to, and recollections of, her father are full of the most ardent and devoted admiration for him. She has overcome her initial self-consciousness and reluctance even to mention his name, for fear that she would appear to be seeking to bask in his reflected glory.

While she has matured and gained self-confidence, she has shed that reticence. She has acquired a balanced perspective of the personality and historical role played by the beloved 'Papu' who was not only her father but also her teacher and leader, who taught her everything—including the importance of an individual developing his or her own personality, having a mind and a will of his or her own!

Her speech, while laying the foundation stone of the Nehru

1. **INDIRA GANDHI IS SORT OF DE GAULLE OF INDIA**, an article which first appeared in the *New York Times* of 24th December, 1972, and was later reprinted by *Imprint* of Bombay.



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Many eminent and shrewd political commentators and analysts are busy comparing the personalities, diplomatic acumen and political strategies of Jawaharlal and Indira. It would have gladdened the heart of Indira's affectionate and indulgent father. After all, the *Guru* is never happier than when the disciple can equal or surpass the *Guru*. That, indeed, is complete fulfilment for the *Guru*!

Chalapathi Rau, the eminent editor of *National Herald*, who has intimately known both Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi for the last thirty years, has compared the two in a fascinating article on "Nehru and Indira—A Study In Style."<sup>1</sup> In the course of this article he says :

Nehru's style, both in public life and writing, had a spacious rhythm as broad as the rhythm of history, Indira's is as crisp as the sweep of a scythe. Nehru looked back to the past and forward to the future in dealing with present problems, Indira hits the nail on the head.... Nehru had to deal with recalcitrant colleagues, each of them formidable with words : Indira has had to deal with a whole crowd of them, and because they were collectively dealing with far more dangerous weapons than words, she had to be firm and ruthless.... Yet Nehru was not a Buddha, and Indira is not a head-hunter.

The basic difference between Jawaharlal and his daughter was a difference of style, of temperament. Yet it appears to me that their seemingly contrasting personalities, and their achievements, were complementary, rather than contradictory.

Jawaharlal was a link between the Gandhian Era and the Modern Age, his heart belonged to the Mahatma, but his mind was influenced by Karl Marx. Indira has no such contradictions to contend with, she belongs to the post-Gandhi, post-Marx generation, to whom both dogmas are irrelevant.

Jawaharlal was a polite gentleman, surrounded by cranks and crooks, morons and mediocrities, whom he tolerated and suffered to his cost. Indira Gandhi is a tough lady, surround-

1. In *Surge*, New Delhi.

ed by climbers and creepers whom she may discard when they have served their purpose.

Jawaharlal was too intelligent to be rigid in his outlook, he was accused of Hamlet-like indecisiveness ("To be or not to be!") because, as a philosopher, he knew there are different roads to Truth, while his daughter suffers from no such inhibitions and moral dilemmas.

Jawaharlal Nehru was sensitive, delicate, over-refined, in short he had all the seemingly *feminine* virtues in him; Indira Gandhi, on the other hand, has all the apparently *masculine* virtues—she is practical, determined, resolute, and strong-willed. But creativity requires the union of both the male principle and the female principle.

Nehru was a Socialist, but more than a Socialist, he was a Citizen of the World, who made a vital contribution to the cause of Peace, and to the liberation of Asia and Africa. He was bigger than the office of the Prime Minister that he held for 17 years, even as Lenin was bigger than the office of the People's Commissar of the Soviet Union. Like Lenin in Russia, Nehru was the product of a revolutionary moment in India's history, and he had helped to generate the forces that created that historic moment.

Indira is cast in a different, less heroic and historic, but no less significant, mould. Nehru was the originator, the visualiser, of policies and programmes; Indira is the continuator, the consolidator, the implementor of these policies and programmes.

But, above all, the difference between Jawaharlal and Indira lies not only in their personalities but, rather, in the changed mood and circumstances of the Indian people. Nehru's main task was to rouse, awaken, inspire, liberate and revolutionize the thoughts and deeds of his people who had been steeped in centuries of social and intellectual inertia. Indira Gandhi is dealing with the turbulent post-Nehru India which requires to be stabilised, consolidated, saved from its own fissiparous tendencies, and dangers of violent disintegration. The epochs throw up the kind of leaders that the people of a country need and deserve at a particular time.

Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi—a dreamer who

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Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi—a dreamer who

transmitted his dream to his daughter—need there be a comparison, much less a clash, between the architect and the engineer, the man of creative vision and the woman of strong individuality, will power and determination who is striving to transform her father's vision into a reality?

What does Indira Gandhi think of herself? She is not vain, but she does not suffer from false modesty, either. She is conscious of her limitations, and of the enormous and complicated difficulties of administering a vast democracy like India, but she is confident that she can tackle the task a little better than any one else. Asked by an interviewer how she regarded the possibility of being the Prime Minister of India for twenty years, as many thought she would, she exclaimed, "Oh, my God, I don't know how long I will remain Prime Minister and I don't even care to remain Prime Minister. All I want to do is a good job until I am no longer able. The day I understand that I am no longer able, I will give up before they make me give up. For the moment, I feel I can. But, she added wistfully, "nothing lasts for ever, and nobody can say what is going to happen to me in the future."

In her speech at Calcutta, just on the eve of Pakistan's aerial aggression that started the 14-days war, she said of herself, "Some newspapers abroad have described me as a stubborn person. I am not stubborn, but I believe in persisting in what I consider right and just. This is steadfastness, not stubbornness."

In fact, resilience and responsiveness to the urges, the aspirations and the demands of the people, and of the situation, mark her major political decisions. That, indeed, is the basis of her phenomenal popularity—and her power.

Like every true democratic leader she is constantly tuned-in to the people to know what their urges and aspirations, demands and expectations are. Her power rises from her ability to make at least some of their dreams come true.

But, occasionally, she might get blindspots, or her channels of communication with the people become clogged by vested interests or petty sycophants and self-seekers who, for their own reasons, want to protect her from the truth!

It is perfectly true, as she has often said, that *Garibi Hatao* (Remove Poverty) is not a programme of instant socialism that can be achieved overnight by magic, and that "the removal of poverty cannot be achieved by one, or by a Government, or by a Party, but only by all the people working together." But it is not true, as she has also sometimes stated, that "we do not have the sort of poverty today which we had before independence", that during her tours she has not "seen even one person in any part of the country as we saw the majority of the people before 1947." Or, as she has also several times repeated, there are pockets of acute poverty even in the most advanced and prosperous nations—for instance, in U.S.A. Surely, the Prime Minister has been wrongly advised if she tends to equate the relative poverty of Negro slums and ghettos in the Southern states of U.S.A. (with their tables and chairs, pots and pans, their second-hand cars, their piles of empty beer cans :) with the abject, abysmal poverty of the landless Harijans in the villages of Uttar Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh or Maharashtra. The affluence of the Kulaks or the rich farmers, with their tractors and fertilizers and new-variety seeds, is not shared by the vast majority of the landless or the poor farmers with their uneconomic holdings.

Then, again, the Prime Minister, while undoubtedly sympathising with the economic hardships of the common people, has only a sketchy idea of what the constantly rising price spiral means in the life of the fixed-income groups of the urban lower middle class and the working class. The alienation that excessive security and a "cloistered" and "protected" life, imposed upon the Prime Minister is both unhealthy and politically dangerous. I have heard a housewife in a ration shop queue saying that Indira Gandhi would know more about the economics of the country if she spent five minutes every day looking over details of her kitchen expenses. To which another harassed housewife caustically added, "No, let her come and stand with us in a ration shop queue, and try to buy her provisions—at least once every month!" As the queues for foodgrains, cooking oil, milk and kerosene are lengthening, the talk of the housewives is becoming increasingly bitter. They were all her enthusiastic voters, and supporters, in the

last election. In the next election, unless prices fall and conditions improve, they would be listening to any demagogue or fanatic who promises them three measures of rice for a rupee, or milk for their children at fifty paise per litre !

A politician and a Party leader has to be prepared for both fair and unfair attacks upon him or her. That is a part of the democratic game, and every Party indulges in this mutual mud-slinging. Within reason, and within limits, it is not a bad thing for it keeps the people in power on their toes all the time. The call-girl racket which lately shook the Tory Government in England is a case in point, for Her Majesty's Opposition did not fail to make political capital out of it. The Watergate scandal involving Nixon and his aides has definitely paid political dividends to the Democratic Party.

They say in Delhi that the Maruti small car affair of Sanjay is Indira Gandhi's Watergate scandal. An opposition wit quipped in my presence, undoubtedly for my benefit "*Ma-ro-ti kyon hai ?*" (Why does the mother cry now ?) which was quite a clever, though not very elegant, pun on the phonetics of the word "*Maruti*".

I talked to a friend who happens to be a Minister of State, and is one of those who are supposed to know the Prime Minister's mind.

"Why should the licence to manufacture a small car be given to the Prime Minister's son ?" I asked.

"What should a Minister's—or a Prime Minister's—son do ?" he counter-asked me. "Earn his living by charging 5% commission—?" as some Ministers' sons did and, perhaps, still do ? I got the message.

Then he seriously explained that while the Prime Minister's son should not be given any *undue* preference, at the same time his being the Prime Minister's son should not bar him from any position for which he is qualified. After all, he still remains a citizen, a worker and a tax-payer.

Sanjay Gandhi, said my Minister friend, proved that he could manufacture a small car with Indian materials and components, and a Letter of Intent was issued to him—along with two others. Naturally, engineering enterprises attract money as



salary he gets from the Indian Airlines Corporation, mainly flying the old and decrepit Night Air Mail planes. At least on one occasion, the Prime Minister's son has piloted the plane on which I happened to be a passenger.

Sanjay, the younger one, did not choose to go to a University. As a child he had played with toy cars, and as a boy he had been fascinated by the mechanism of cars. So, instead of going to college, he spent five years as an apprentice in the Rolls Royce manufacturing plant, near London. This was a tough training and a hard life; no one gave him a second look because he was Jawaharlal Nehru's grandson, or Indira Gandhi's son. He had to live as an ordinary worker. He was still in England when his mother became Prime Minister, and only then pressmen thought of interviewing him about what he thought of the chances of his mother in her new office, "Will she be able to make it a success?" He was asked, and he replied, "If I know my mother, she will!"

When he came back, he was anxious to do something on his own. After some over-publicised youthful pranks and escapades, he set up a workshop in one of the slum areas around Delhi, where a shed could be hired for a reasonable amount. There, in the company of, and with the help of, truck-drivers, mechanics and blacksmiths, he worked ten hours a day, in scorching summer and in draughty, freezing winter, with few implements and hardly any money. Bit by bit, laboriously, out of scrap iron, using a blacksmith's open forge, and a ramshackle lathe, he began to manufacture each separate part of the car which remained an obsessive dream with him for more than three years.

At last one day the "small car" was complete and ready, and after he had given free lifts to his own mechanics and many of his proletarian cronies—truck-drivers and scooter-wallahs and slum-dwellers—he drove it along the roads of New Delhi, getting rude and quizzical stares from the owners of the fancy Cadillacs and Impalas. At last he had brought it home and invited his mother to have a ride in the serviceable contraption which he had decided to name "*Maruti*"—after the monkey god in the Ramayana!

If he was not the son of Indira Gandhi, Sanjay and his first

"small car", entirely designed and manufactured in India with Indian materials, would have made exciting material for illustrated feature stories in newspapers and magazines. But Sanjay could not disclaim his proud heritage, and Indira could not escape the slings and arrows of the Opposition and the Press.

But, while Sanjay Gandhi's enterprise in fashioning a *swadeshi* small car is commendable and unexceptionable, it is also true that the men of money have vied with each other to finance his project, to buy shares and become directors of Maruti Ltd. Their motives, to say the least, are questionable and suspect. It is difficult to believe that rayon-manufacturers and whiskey-distillers have, all of a sudden, become interested in the making of small cars. Sanjay Gandhi still dresses in khaddar *kurta-pajama* (like his father Feroze Gandhi), sports a small black beard, and is still too shy and reticent a figure to be mistaken for a tycoon or a capitalist—the Henry Ford of India, as people are already beginning to call him derisively. The way he campaigned for the new Congress in the slums of Delhi in the 1971 elections showed that his political heart was in the right place. But henceforward this young Socialist, the son of a Socialist father and a Socialist mother, the grandson of a Socialist grandfather, will be involved, perhaps involuntarily involved, in the capitalists' money-making process which is the very antithesis of Socialism. This process has its own inexorable logic which is likely to impinge on the future of his mother—and the future of his motherland !

Indira Gandhi, holding a left-of-centre position, is in the unhappy position of being attacked both from the Left and the Right. While the Left extremists like the Naxalites and the C.P.M. and, sometimes, even the Praja Socialists accuse her of being an apologist for monopolists and capitalists, the Right extremists of the Jana Sangh, the Swatantra and the "Syndicate" Congress charge her with having sold India to the Soviet Union, in collusion with the Indian Communists. By subtle and unsubtle innuendos a link is sought to be established between her and the Communists. Some call her a hidden "Red", while others hold her to be the Communists' cat's-paw and a dupe. The Prime Minister herself told me: "Today

there is a concerted campaign being mounted to brand me as a Communist or as a tool of the Communists"

It is the old technique of lumping together all progressives as "Reds" and then damning them by conjuring the horrible vision of anti-Christ or (in the Indian context) *adharma*. It served its purpose for Hitler and it was tried again by Joseph MacCarthy and his smear campaign through the Committee on Un-American Activities. But this strategy is outdated in an age when Nixon has to shuttle between Moscow and Peking in order to secure his own position. Indira Gandhi is no more a Communist than President Roosevelt, who was also accused of being a partisan of the "Reds". She is not even a Marxist like her father, she is only a Social Democrat like a revitalized Aneurin Bevan or Ernest Bevin or, in the contemporary context, like Willy Brandt or Gough Whitlam of Australia. Why, then, all these attacks upon her, labelling her as a Communist? It is not that she *is* a Communist but because she is *not* a fanatical anti-Communist as her Rightist detractors would wish her to be. Her crime is that she does not regard Communism as a dirty word that must be expunged from decent society. She sees in Communism an extreme form of Socialism with some of whose features and doctrines she does not agree. But she knows and admits that it is a widely-accepted ideology, and the C.P.I. is a legitimate political party with which the Congress, if it truly adheres to its Socialist aims and professions, has many things in common—as it has with any other Socialist Party. Both in the Centre, and the states, there are areas of action in which the Indira Congress would, and should, seek the cooperation of all Socialist forces, including the Communist Party of India. This cooperation, in Kerala, takes the form of a coalition government in which the Congress is a partner under the Chief Ministership of Achhuta Meason—and Indira Gandhi cannot overlook the fact that this state Government is ahead of all other states in the matter of implementing the Congress policies like Land Reforms and the other measures aimed at social and economic transformation.

Having jettisoned anti-Communism, along with other prejudices and predilections of the Congress Right, Indira Gandhi was able to take advantage of the services, in the Government

struggle which trained and prepared them for democracy, and at least a quarter century of experience of parliamentary democracy, with freedom of expression and organisation, to allow themselves to be ruled by a dictatorship.

She has discouraged all attempts to deify her, or even to build a Cult of Personality around her. The few places and institutions and organisations named after her have been so named, in spite of her, with no encouragement from her. She has frowned upon even the habit of using the Prime Minister's portrait as a wall decoration in offices.

Nor has she shown any inclination to use Governmental or Presidential powers (which, constitutionally, are exercised on the advice of the Prime Minister) to curb criticism of herself—either political, ideological or even personal. There are several newspapers and periodicals (in English and in the other Indian languages) which specialize in publishing the most provocative, preposterous and sometimes even libellous trash about her, in the hope that one day she would give them a chance of earning cheap notoriety by taking legal action against them. So far she has stoically faced this un-gallant barrage of a section of the Press, even when she knows that it is clearly abusing the freedom of the Press.

Whatever her other weaknesses might be, squeamishness is certainly not one of them. On occasions her sharp-tongued critics have directly attacked her on radio and T.V. without any repercussions. Such freedom of expression would have been the first casualty if she was aiming at a totalitarian or personal dictatorship.

What can happen and, in some ways, is happening now is that with the concentration of political and administrative decision-making, a Presidential form of government is evolving in India. But the basis of this power-structure is the will of the people, expressed through periodic democratic elections. The people of India, except the half a million in the Rae Bareilly constituency who voted her to be a member of the Lok Sabha, did not directly vote for Indira Gandhi to be the Prime Minister of India. But the overwhelming majority of them voted for the Congress Party candidates *because of* Indira Gandhi, *because of* what she had said, and *because of* what she had done

dency to move in the reverse gear.

She knows that, lacking ideological clarity and commitment among the top echelons of the Congress leadership, specially in the States, this state of affairs will continue, with occasional reshuffling of Tweedledums and Tweedledees, which she has tried several times. She knows also that so long as the Congress needs large funds for elections and other expenses, she will have to tolerate a certain type of persons in the Congress and in her Government, who can collect these funds from those who have the money, on the tacit (if not explicit) understanding that these financial favours will be duly reciprocated. The huge cost of electioneering is the bane of democracy.

The alternatives suggested by some of her colleagues who are concerned about the problem, are indirect elections (as Gandhiji had once mooted) or compulsory voting (so that no money need be spent on making people to vote) or a Government grant for electioneering expenses of each Party, proportionately on the basis of votes polled by the Party in the last elections. But Indira Gandhi does not seem to be unduly perturbed by the heavy (financial and ideological!) cost of elections and feels that "with better understanding of people's psychology and better management it should be possible to curtail expenditure." Indirect elections, according to her, "will lead to greater manipulation." Compulsory voting, she says is impractical in a vast country like India. It is a problem that she will have to squarely face and resolve one day in her own resolute and resourceful way.

Is there a chance of Indira Gandhi using her popularity and power to turn herself into a dictator?

Many opposition leaders and speakers, specially those belonging to the Jana Sangh and the Swatantra Party, accuse her of totalitarian trends, of trying to become a dictator, but no responsible and impartial observer who knows Indira, and knows India and the Indian people, entertains such fears. She is too rational, too refined, too balanced, in some ways too much of an aristocrat, to be in danger of going for the crude gimmicks of a dictator. Moreover, the Indian people are too politically conscious with a long experience of a national

President of the Congress on the behest of shrewd political manipulators, and who was made to recommend dismissal (in Kerala) of the first democratically-elected Communist government anywhere in the world. She was the figurehead chosen by the "Syndicate" to be the successor of Lal Bahadur Shastri, but soon she disappointed them, when she asserted her will, on behalf of the people. She has been tested by fire in the crucible of war; she was resolute in battle, as she was magnanimous in victory. She has changed the mood of the people—given them hope of working together for a better life. Even the violent explosions of mass discontent, frustration and anger are a measure of the high hopes that she had been able to generate among the people. And the people have changed her, moulded her, shaped her, into a sword-sharp instrument of their destiny. The people have given her power, so that she will use it on their behalf.

Can she afford to disappoint the people by being less resolute in the war against the factionalism, tribalism, corruption and the vested interests still entrenched in her own Party and Government? The signs are ominous—particularly in the states, but also at the Centre—she can disregard them only at her peril, and at the peril, of India.

but mainly because of what she proposed to do, what she promised and what she represented, because of the vision of Socialist India without poverty in which every one would be helped to live a life of dignity and decency, that she had projected. There was a compact and a contract between her and the people of India ; it was unwritten, but both were bound by the terms of the mandate.

Among the many platitudinous praises showered upon her, after the liberation of Bangla Desh, were several based on mythological allusions, India's victory was compared with Rama's victory over Ravan's Lanka. She was called *Mahishasura Mardhini*—the goddess who killed a demon. She was called *Trimurti*, the three-in-one combination of various aspects of the Supreme Divine Power—*Brahma* the Creator, *Vishnu* the Preserver, *Shiva* the destroyer. Aptest, perhaps, was the appellation *Durga* (who is also called *Shakti* or Power) who is often depicted mounted on a tiger.

He who rides the tiger cannot dismount. The moment he relaxes control of the tiger, the powerful king of the Jungle might devour him.

*She who rides the tiger*—the tiger of power, of popularity and the people's approbation won by raising the hopes and expectations of the people—also cannot afford to dismount, or to relax control of the king-sized animal. The lady and the tiger have to constantly move forward if disaster has to be prevented. The people may look weak or stupid or ignorant but, in their collective majesty, they have the power and the strength—and the ferocity—of a tiger. The parable must end here.

Indira Gandhi, at the end of seven years, is still growing, maturing, becoming wiser and shrewder, even if on occasions she appears to be too discreet—or indiscreet !

"Change is the only constant of life", she has said more than once. She represents this dynamic philosophy of renewal in her own image. She is no believer in the *status quo*. Today she is not the lonely little girl who played with tin-soldiers. She is not the diffident political debutante who was elected the

## Post-Script

AS I AM CORRECTING THE FINAL PROOFS OF THIS BOOK, THERE IS a news despatch from Sydney that a cross-section of Australian voters has declared Indira Gandhi to be "the most honest, competent, impressive and respected world leader with great charm and tolerance."

The mass of the Indian people are likely to greet this news with indifference. "So what?"—I can hear them saying in the queues before the empty ration shops, in the clamorous crowds at the dripping water-taps in the slums.

A few days earlier, the newspapers had given front-page prominence to the story of one Garibdas, an old landless labourer of village Golouhan in Banda district of Uttar Pradesh, who told a Congress Party leader that "twelve *paise* (less than two cents) and one *chapati*" was the daily wage he received for his work in the fields.

Two weeks earlier, in Surendranagar (Gujarat), a 25-year-old woman killed her three-year-old daughter and two-month-old son by throwing them into a well and then jumping in herself. Her neighbours said she committed suicide because she had no means to feed her children. The meagre daily wage of her husband, a labourer, was not sufficient to feed the family and he had already sold all the brass vessels in the house to buy food.

These two news-items, from two ends of the country, are by no means exceptional instances of the people's misery. A



prices, are only symptoms of the dangerous social ferment. The reactionaries and the fanatics, ironically using progressive slogans, are already marshalling their forces and mounting a campaign. Unless she acts fast, and decisively, the people—in their confusion and desperation—might well turn to them in the next elections. It is at once a challenge—and a warning—to Indira Gandhi

She can yet be the saviour of the country—if she will only resolutely and, if necessary, ruthlessly root out corruption, and implement her own policies and programmes, enunciated in the Congress Election Manifesto. It would be dangerous for her, and disastrous for the country, if Indira fails to live up to the compact that the people made with her by electing her and her Party to power.

If Indira Gandhi does not listen to the warnings of her well-wishers, she will soon have to contend with the onslaught of her—and India's—embattled foes. For, as the old adage has it—

Only the friend warns—  
The enemy strikes !

Head of the Government, she must accept ultimate responsibility not only for the corrupt and inefficient Ministers and officials of her Government but even for the rapacious profiteering which goes on unchecked by all the forces of law and order, and the special powers vested in them under the Defence of India Rules.

The people who gave her full credit for the forward-looking measures taken by her Government, now have reason to blame her for the indecision, the prevarications and the compromises with the wrong-doers, which have resulted in aggravating the mass distress beyond endurance. The sense of disappointment and frustration is greater and acuter because of the high hopes that she had inspired in the people, only two years ago.

It is not surprising that a poll conducted by the Indian Institute of Public Opinion revealed that Indira Gandhi's popularity index, which was at its peak during the Bangla Desh crisis and the war in late 1971 and immediately after, is now said to be lower than it was in May 1966, when she first became Prime Minister.

And yet everyone knows—though only some care to admit it—that, despite the questionable elements in her Party and the many glaring failures of her Government, Indira at the moment is India's only hope. There is no alternative to her. Which is to say that none of the other leaders of the Congress Party has the assets of ideology and character, necessary for a national leader who has also to be a symbol for 550 million people. But much more was expected of Indira Gandhi than to be merely better than the rest of them.

Destiny—which is another name for historical forces—had endowed her with peculiar and extraordinary gifts as well as opportunities to serve and lead her people to a better tomorrow. She has only partially utilised those gifts and those opportunities. The people, disenchanted with her Government, have not lost all hope in her. They still look up to her, more than to any one else. But the shining hope of 1971 has turned to the dim-eyed hope-against-hope at the end of 1973.

The sands of time are running out as the last lingering hope in the eyes of the hungry people gives place to disappointment, anger and violent upheaval. The food riots, the looting of ration shops, the violent demonstrations against spiralling